

---

# A Lincoln Conscript

---



By  
Homer Greene

---



0579, 2.

1872


18





# A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant



(page 244)

“MY BOY, OF SUCH STUFF ARE PATRIOTS AND HEROES MADE.”

# A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT BY HOMER GREENE

ILLUSTRATED BY T. DE THULSTRUP



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
BOSTON AND NEW YORK : THE  
RIVERSIDE PRESS, CAMBRIDGE

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY HOMER GREENE

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*Published April 1909*

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

# CONTENTS

I. "THE SINS OF THE FATHERS"	1
II. NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG	27
III. A LOVER OF LINCOLN	52
IV. THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD	77
V. AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST	100
VI. A DESPERATE DECISION	122
VII. OFF TO THE WAR	143
VIII. A LETTER FROM THE FRONT	166
IX. WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN	191
X. FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG	215
XI. THE GREAT TRAGEDY	238
XII. THE WELCOME HOME	260





# A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

## CHAPTER I

### “THE SINS OF THE FATHERS”

ON the second day of July in the year 1863 the Civil War in America was at its height. Late in the preceding month Lee had turned his face northward, and, with an army of a hundred thousand Confederate soldiers at his back, had marched up into Pennsylvania. There was little to hinder his advance. Refraining, by reason of strict orders, from wanton destruction of property, his soldiers nevertheless lived on the rich country through which they passed. York and Carlisle were in their grasp. Harrisburg was but a day's march away, and now, on this second day of July, flushed with fresh victories, they had turned and were giving desperate battle, through the streets and on the hills of

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Gettysburg, to the Union armies that had followed them.

The old commonwealth was stirred as she had not been stirred before since the fall of Sumter. Every town and village in the state responded quickly to the governor's call for emergency troops to defend the capital city. Mount Hermon, already depleted by generous early enlistments, and by the draft of 1862, gathered together the bulk of the able-bodied men left in the village and its surroundings, and sent them forth in defense of the commonwealth. Not that Mount Hermon was in especial danger from Lee's invasion, far from it. Up in the northeastern corner of the state, on a plateau of one of the low foot-hills of the Moosic range, sheltered by the mountains at its back, it was well protected, both by reason of distance and location, from the advancing foe. But Mount Hermon was intensely patriotic. In the days preceding the Revolution the sturdy pioneers from Connecticut had met the equally sturdy

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

settlers from the domain of Penn, and on this plateau they had fought out their contentions and settled their differences; the son of the Pennamite had married the daughter of the Yankee; and the new race, with love of country tingeing every drop of its blood a deeper red, had stayed on and possessed the land. So, on this July day, when the armies of North and South were striving and struggling with each other in bloody combat back and forth across the plain and up the hills of Gettysburg, Mount Hermon's heart beat fast. But it was not for themselves that these people were anxious. It was for the fathers, husbands, sons, lovers in that army with which Meade, untried and unproven, was endeavoring to match the strategy and strength of Lee. News of the first day's skirmishing had reached the village, and it was felt that a great battle was imminent. In the early evening, while the women were still busy at their household tasks, the men gathered at the post-office

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

and the stores, eager for late news, anxious to discuss the situation as they had learned it. In the meantime the boys of the town had congregated on the village green to resume the military drills which, with more or less frequency, they had carried on during the summer. These drills were not wholly without serious intent. It was play, indeed; but, out of the ranks of these boys, three of the older ones had already gone to the front to fight real battles; and it was felt, by the men of the town, that the boys could not be too thoroughly imbued with the military spirit. So, on this July evening, wakened into new ardor by the news from Gettysburg, they had gathered to resume their nightly work — and play.

There were thirty-three of them, ranging in years all the way from eight to eighteen. They were eager and enthusiastic. And the light of the low sun, shining red on their faces, disclosed a spirit of earnestness among them, as well as that appreciation

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

of sport common to all American boys. At the command to fall in there was much pushing and jostling, much striving for desirable places, and even the young captain, with great show of authority, could not quite adjust all differences to the complete satisfaction of his men.

Before the confusion had wholly ceased, and while there were still awkward gaps in the ranks, a tall, straight, shy-mannered boy of seventeen, who had remained hitherto on the outskirts of the group, quietly slipped into one of the vacant places.

The ranks being finally formed, the orderly sergeant stepped out in front of the company to call the roll. By some inadvertence he had lost or mislaid his list of names, and for the moment he was at a loss what to do. But his quick wit came to his rescue, and, beginning at the right of the line, he called the names of those who were under his eye.

“Albright!”

“Here.”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Valentine!”

“Here.”

“Bannister!”

“Here.”

It was the tall straight boy who had slipped quietly into the ranks who responded to this last name. Down the line there went a little murmur of surprise, and before the sergeant could call the next name, one of his soldiers stepped one pace to the front and struck his hand violently against his breast.

The astonished sergeant ceased suddenly to call the roll.

“What’s the matter with you, Sam?” he inquired.

“I want to know,” said Sam, resentment ringing in his voice, “what right Bob Bannister has to be in this company.”

“Why ain’t he got a right?” responded the sergeant.

“Because he’s a traitor,” replied the indignant Sam.

“And his father’s a copperhead,” added



## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

another fledgeling soldier, stepping also one pace to the front. Then came from the ranks generally a chorus of protest against the admission of the tall straight youth to the privileges of the drill.

The sergeant, turning appealingly to the captain, who was standing with folded arms at some little distance, said deprecatingly: "It's none o' my business. All I got to do is to call the roll. I don't muster 'em in."

Whereupon the captain, fifteen years of age, took the matter up.

"Let private Bannister step to the front," he commanded.

The accused boy fell out of the rear rank, passed to the left of the line, and so on to the front.

"Speak for yourself, Bob," he said. "You're charged with being a traitor."

"It's not true," replied the boy quietly but firmly, his face flushing and paling by turns.

"Well, what about your father?" cried

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Sam. "Ain't he said 't this war's a failure and 't Abe Lincoln's a fraud?"

"An' ain't he the biggest copperhead in Mount Hermon township?" piped up a small boy on the extreme left.

Whereupon there was another chorus of denunciation, and a half-dozen boys shouted at once: "We don't want any son of a copperhead in this company!"

"Shut up, you fellows!" exclaimed the captain, "or I'll have every mother's son of you arrested for breach of discipline, an' shut you up in the guard-house on bread an' water, every one of you. Now, let's get at this thing orderly. We'll give Bob a fair hearing an' then decide whether we want him or not."

"Yes," added Sam, "le's court-martial 'im. That 's the way to settle his hash."

The idea of court-martialing the objectionable applicant for military privileges met with instant approval on the part of the company. Whereupon the captain at once made his appointments for the purpose.

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

“You, Brilly — Lieutenant Brill, you be judge-advocate general; you, Sergeant Davis and Corporal Guild, you be assistant judge-advocate general; you, Sam Powers, you be prosecuting attorney, and you, Private Grimstone, you defend the prisoner. All three of you sit down on the bench under this tree an’ hear the witnesses.”

“Aw, shucks!” exclaimed a disgusted youth, leaving the ranks and walking away. “You fellows are too smart. If you don’t want ’im, kick ’im out an’ done with it, an’ you’ll kick out the best soldier in the company. Court-martial snakes! Aw, shucks!”

“You, Bill Hinkle,” retorted the captain, “you’re discharged in disgrace for insubordination. Now, boys, come on. Oh, I forgot! Break ranks, march!”

But the ranks were already broken beyond immediate repair, and the crowd surged toward the bench on which the members of the military trial court were already seated. Witnesses were at once called to prove what every one knew, that Bob

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Bannister's father was an open sympathizer with the South, that he had declared the war to be a mistake and a failure and Abraham Lincoln to be a fraud. Then Bob's lawyer called for witnesses to come to Bob's defense; but no one came. His cause was too unpopular. So the attorney called on Bob himself.

"Now you just stand up here," he said, "before these judges, an' make a clean breast o' the whole business, an' throw yourself on the mercy of this honorable court; an' don't you tell no lies because we won't have it; do you hear?"

Thus commanded by his own counsel, Bob stood up to face his accusers. Although he was one of the oldest boys present, and capable, both by reason of his bigness and his mental ability, of being their leader, yet his natural diffidence and his unfortunate paternal connection had kept him in the background during the entire course of the war. In this mock trial he saw no humor. To him it was very real and

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

of much moment. He felt that the time was come when he should either be vindicated as a loyal citizen, fit to associate with his fellows, or else shut out permanently from their companionship. His face was very pale as he began to speak, his dark eyes were suffused with emotion, and a stray lock of his black hair hung damp across his forehead.

“I’m no traitor,” he began. “It’s not right to call me a traitor. And I’m no copperhead either. I believe in the war. I believe in Abraham Lincoln, and I—I love the flag.”

He turned his eyes up toward the stars and stripes drooping lazily from the summit of the great pole planted on the village green.

“Well, ain’t your father a copperhead?” asked the prosecuting lawyer savagely. “An’ ain’t he talked ag’inst Lincoln, an’ ag’inst the soldiers, an’ ag’inst the war, an’ ag’inst the govament, an’ ag’inst — ag’inst the whole business? Ain’t he? An’ ain’t

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

you his son, an' ain't you got to mind him? An' don't you believe he tells the truth? Do you s'pose your father'd lie? Answer me that now. Do you think he'd lie?"

The prosecuting attorney turned toward his auditors with a smile and a nod, as much as to say: "That's a clincher, I've got him now."

But by this time Bob's diffidence had disappeared. The under part of his nature was roused and ready to assert itself. He lifted his head, and his eyes sparkled as he looked around him.

"My father is no liar," he replied. "He says what he believes to be true about the war. Maybe he's mistaken. That's not for me to say, nor for you. But so far as I'm concerned, I tell you again that I'm loyal. I stand by the President, and by the government, and by the flag; and some day I'll fight for it, and I'll do things for it that you, Sam Powers, and you, Jim Brill, and all the rest of you would n't dare to do."

He stood erect, with flushed face and

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

flashing eyes, and for a brief moment his accusers were silent. Then, gently at first, but increasing soon to a storm of protest, the voices of his companions were heard in reply. In the midst of the confusion the judge-advocate general held up his hand for silence.

“It appears to the court” — he began, but a voice interrupted him: —

“Question! Put the question!”

With little knowledge of parliamentary rules, and still less of proceedings before a court-martial, the judge-advocate general and his associates looked a trifle dazed.

“Question! I call for the question,” demanded the person with insistent voice. “Shall Bob Bannister be allowed to be a member of this company?”

The judge-advocate general pulled himself together and slowly repeated the question: —

“Shall Bob Bannister be allowed to be a member of this company? All you that want him say Yes.”



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Three feeble and uncertain voices responded in the affirmative.

“And all you that don’t want him say No.”

The chorus of noes was triumphantly loud.

“The noes win,” declared the judge-advocate general; and the captain added, “The court’s adjourned sign dee.”

“Aw, shucks!” exclaimed Bill Hinkle, now in disgrace himself and therefore more in sympathy with Bob. “You fellows know a lot, don’t you! You’re smart, ain’t you! W’y, Bob Bannister’s the best man you got. I’ll back him to lick any three of you, with one hand tied behind ’is back, by jimminy! You’ve made regular nincompoops o’ yourselves, you have. Aw, shucks!”

And the deeply and doubly disgusted one walked away.

So did Bob Bannister walk away. He went with bent head and breaking heart. To be denied the right to join with his companions in any demonstration looking to his

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

country's glory or welfare was, to him, a tragedy. His was one of those natures endowed at birth with a spirit of patriotism. From the time when he could first read he had absorbed the history of his country and her heroes. No colors had ever shone before his eyes more brilliant and beautiful than the red, white, and blue of his country's flag. With an intuition far beyond his years, he had grasped the meaning and foreseen the consequences of a dissolution of the compact that bound the states together. And when, at last, the storm broke, when Sumter fell, when Bull Run came, an awakening calamity, he threw his whole heart and soul into the cause of the North, and from that time on he lived in spirit, and would have died in body, with the Union armies, fighting, that the old flag and all that it symbolized might prevail. Yet, strange as it may seem, his father, with whom he lived, of whom he was proud and fond, to whom he was loyally obedient, was an outspoken sympathizer with the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Southern Confederacy. Perhaps it was the strain of Southern blood in his veins, perhaps it was the underlying aristocracy of feeling of those whose ancestors have owned slaves, perhaps it was the clear logic of his mind running in the narrow grooves that genius so often hollows out, that led Rhett Bannister into his passionate sympathy with the South. Be that as it may, he was no coward. What he was, what he felt, what he thought, was known of all men. Opposition could not conquer him, opprobrious epithets could not cow him, nor could ostracism silence his eloquent tongue.

Notwithstanding the general and fervent loyalty of the community in which Bannister lived, there were, nevertheless, among the people, those who felt that the war was a mistake and a failure, that the issue had been tried out at an awful sacrifice with but indifferent success, and that now peace should be had on any reasonable terms. These were the conservatives, the loco-

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

focos. Then there were those who, deeply sympathizing with the South from the beginning of the trouble, were ready to make any legal opposition to a further prosecution of the war by the Federal government, using politics and public speech as their strongest weapons. These were classed in the North as copperheads. Then there were still others who, saying little and clothing their conduct with secrecy, gave what aid, comfort, and active coöperation they could to the enemies of the Federal government. These were plainly spoken of as traitors. Indeed, secret organizations sprang up in the North and West, with their lodges, officers, grips, and passwords, having for their object a concentrated effort to undermine the patriotic efforts of the citizens of the North and the administration at Washington, and to aid indirectly in the defeat of the Union armies in the field. Perhaps the most deeply rooted organization of the kind in the loyal states was known as the Knights of the Golden Circle.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

But Rhett Bannister was not one of their members. He despised the stab in the dark, and all secret and unfair methods of warfare. Frank, eloquent, and outspoken, he never hesitated to say and to do freely and openly that which he deemed to be right, regardless of the opinions, the condemnation, or even the hate of his neighbors.

It was to this father and to his home that the boy, refused admission into the patriotic ranks of his comrades, now started on his way. At the edge of the village he met Sarah Jane Stark. There are some people who are always known, not only to their friends but to the public also, by their full names. Sarah Jane Stark was one of them. She had lived in Mount Hermon all her life. How long that was it would be ungallant to say, had not Miss Stark herself declared boastfully that she had come within fifteen years of living in two centuries. With no children of her own, she was a mother to all the children in the village. Kindhearted, sharp-tongued, a terror to evil-



"I'M NO TRAITOR."







## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

doers, "a very present help in trouble" to all the worthy who needed her assistance, the social arbiter of the town, she was the most loved as well as the most feared woman in the community. When she met Bob in the footpath at the roadside, she looked at him sharply.

"Look here, Bob Bannister," she said, "you've been crying. Or if you have n't, you've been so close to it there was n't any fun in it. Now you just go ahead and tell me what the matter is."

Bob knew from previous experience, on many occasions, that it was absolutely useless to attempt evasion with Sarah Jane Stark. Much as his sensitive nature rebelled against complaining of any slight that his fellows had put upon him, he felt that he must make a clean breast of it to his questioner.

"Why, they put me out of the company, Miss Stark," he said. "I wanted to drill in the company with the other fellows and they would n't let me. That's all. I s'pose

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

they had a right to do it; of course they had a right."

"Put you out of the company, did they? And what did they put you out for, I'd like to know? Are n't you as good a soldier as any of them?"

"Well, that was n't exactly it, Miss Stark. They seemed to think that because — well, they thought I was n't loyal."

"Thought you were n't loyal! Well, that is a note! Why, you — oh, I see! On account of your father, eh? Yes, I see."

Miss Stark tapped her foot impatiently on the hard soil of the side-path, and looked off toward the blue sky-line of the Moosic range, behind which the sun had already gone down.

"'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children,'" she said musingly. Then she turned again to Bob.

"You're no copperhead yourself, are you?" she inquired. "You're not even a locofoco, are you?"

"No, indeed, Miss Stark! There is n't

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

one of those boys that believes in putting down the rebellion more than I do, that loves the old flag more than I do, or would fight for it, or for the government, or for Abraham Lincoln, quicker than I would if I had the chance — Miss Stark, I'm loyal, I'm loyal!"

He stood erect, eyes flashing, the color back in his cheeks, the soul within him speaking. Sarah Jane Stark went up to him and put her arm about his shoulders.

"Good!" she cried. "You're the right sort. I wish Abe Lincoln had a hundred thousand at the front just like you. Now you leave that matter about the company to me. I'll see those boys, the little brats, and if they don't take you in I'll —"

"No, Miss Stark, please don't! I could n't go back in now. I could n't ever go in after this. But if the war lasts till I get old enough, I shall be a real soldier in a real company some day."

"Bully for you!"

It was not a very dignified nor refined

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

expression ; but Sarah Jane Stark was noted for expressing herself forcibly when the occasion demanded it, and she felt that this was one of the occasions that demanded it.

“And,” she added, “you go tell Rhett Bannister for me, that if he had one thousandth part of the natural patriotism and horse-sense of his son — No, you need n’t tell him ; I’ll tell him myself. I can do it better. You just trot along home and don’t let the conduct of those fool boys trouble you. You’re right and they’re wrong, and that’s all there is to it.”

So Bob went on his way. The Bannister home lay on the old North and South turn-pike road, a full mile from the centre of the village. A very comfortable home it was, too, neat and prosperous in appearance, with a small and fertile farm behind the commodious house, and a well-kept lawn in front. For Rhett Bannister, theorist though he was, was no mere dreamer of dreams, he was a worker as well ; both the fruit of his brain and the labor of his hands

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

being evident in the comforts by which he was surrounded.

When Bob went up the path to the porch he found his father and mother and his six-year-old sister all there, enjoying the coolness of the evening. It was already too dark for either of his parents to discover in Bob's face any sign of distress, and he did not mention to them his experiences of the evening. But the quick ear of his mother caught the troubled cadence in his voice, and she went over and sat by him and began smoothing the hair back from his forehead.

"You're tired, Robbie," she said, "and it's been such a warm day."

"Did you hear anything new up town about the Pennsylvania raid?" inquired his father.

"Nothing much," replied the boy. "I believe there's been some fighting around Gettysburg, and they're expecting a big battle there to-day."

"Yes," replied the man, "I suppose the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

two armies are facing each other there, very likely the slaughter has already begun. Perhaps there'll be another holocaust like Fredericksburg. Doubtless thousands of lives will be sacrificed and millions of money squandered at Gettysburg, when ten words from the stiff-necked incompetents at Washington would have stopped the horrible conflict and brought peace to the country months ago."

Bob said nothing, he knew it was useless. He had, on two or three occasions, attempted in a feeble way to argue with his father questions pertaining to the war, but he had been fairly swept off his feet by a flood of logic and eloquence, and he had found silence on these matters to be the better part for him to take in the presence of his father.

After a few minutes the man added: "If, even now, Lincoln would concede one half of what the South demands as a plain right —"

Bannister paused. Somewhere in the

## THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

darkness up the road there was a confused sound of voices. Then, from a score of lusty young throats there came in on the still air of the summer night the familiar words of a patriotic song.

“ My country, 't is of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty — ”

“ It sounds good, Robert,” said Rhett Bannister. “ But what's it all about? What does it mean? ”

“ I don't know, father,” said Bob; “ I — I guess it's just the boys a-marching.”

The voices and the words of the song grew clearer and more distinct. Now the steady tramp of marching feet could be distinguished. Then another song broke in upon the night.

“ John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave;  
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave;  
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave;  
But his soul goes marching on.”

Loud, clear, and musical came the  
“ Glory, glory, hallelujah!” chorus; and,



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

indistinctly in the darkness, the figures of the marching company could be discerned, coming down the road in front of the lawn.

The expression on Rhett Bannister's face could not be seen, but his voice was heavy with indignation as he muttered:—

“And that same John Brown was a fanatic, a fool, and a murderer, and richly deserved his fate.”

“They don't know, father,” said Bob apologetically. “They sing it because it sounds good.”

Down by the gate there was, for a moment, an ominous silence, then, full-volumed and vigorous, a new parody on “John Brown's Body” was hurled across the darkness toward the house of the copper-head.

“We'll hang Rhett Ban'ster on a sour-apple tree;  
We'll hang Rhett Ban'ster on a sour-apple tree;  
We'll hang Rhett Ban'ster on a sour-apple tree;  
As we go marching on.”



## CHAPTER II

### NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

**A**T the first line of the daring parody Rhett Bannister and his son both sprang to their feet, the one white with sudden rage, the other stricken with indignation and alarm. With one step the man reached the edge of the porch, with the next he was down on the path on his way to the gate, to give physical expression to his wrath. What would have happened in the road can only be conjectured, had not Bob's frightened little mother run to the porch-steps and called to her husband:—

“Rhett, dear! Rhett, don't! Don't mind them. Come back, Rhett, dear!”

The angry man stopped in his headlong passage down the walk. There had never been a time in all his married life when the pleading voice of his wife had not been sufficient to check any outburst of passion on

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

his part. Daring and defiant to all the world beside when occasion prompted him, he had always been as tender and gentle with her as in the days of their courtship. She was down at his side now, one hand on his arm, trying to soothe his outraged feelings.

“They’re mere boys, Rhett. They don’t know any better. Some day, when they’re older, they’ll regret it. And now you’ll have nothing to regret, Rhett, dear, nothing.”

Up from the road came a defiant shout:

“Hurrah for Abe Lincoln!”

“Down with the copperheads!”

But, even at the height of his rage, with the taunts and threats of his tormentors ringing in his ears, Rhett Bannister turned and took pity on his wife, and led her back to the porch with reassuring words. The unterrified boys, taking up again their line of march, turned into the crossroad on their way back to the village, singing: —

“Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching;  
Cheer up, comrades, they will come.”

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

"I suppose it is n't worth while," said the man, seating himself on the porch-steps and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "The boys are not so much to blame. It's their parents who instill into their minds that spirit of intolerance, who deserve to be chastened. Now you can see, Robert," turning to the boy, "the extremes to which the Northern adherents of Lincoln's cause carry their hate for those who will not agree with them."

"I know, father, I know. It's an outrage. They have treated me even worse than they have you. And yet — and yet I can't believe Lincoln is to blame for it."

For once the defense of Lincoln did not arouse Bannister's ire. He was too deeply interested in what the boy had said of himself.

"And how have they treated you, Robert? What have they done to you?"

"Oh, nothing much. Only they say you're a copperhead, and they — they —"

"Well?"

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“They think I must be a copperhead, too.”

“So! Well, it’s not a pretty name, to be sure, but it stands for something in these days. And suppose you were a copperhead, what then?”

“But I’m not. And that’s how they hurt me.”

“What have they done to you, Robert? What have they said to you? How have they hurt you? I want to know.”

The pitch of anger was back in the man’s voice. He could stand persecution for himself, but to have his loved ones persecuted, that was unbearable.

“Oh, it don’t amount to much,” replied the boy; “they simply did n’t want me, that’s all.”

“Did n’t want you when? where? how? Tell me, Robert! I say, tell me!”

It was the last thing the boy would have told to his father voluntarily, the story of the slight put upon him that evening at the village. But, inadvertently, he had stumbled

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

into the mention of it, and now there was no escape from telling the whole story. He had never learned the art of equivocation, and it did not take many questionings before the whole humiliating tale was in his father's possession. But the outburst of wrath that the boy had feared did not come. Instead, for many minutes, the man sat silent, looking down at the gray footpath losing itself in the shadows of the trees. When at last he raised his head, he spoke slowly as if to himself.

“Poor, weak, wicked human nature! Poor, paltry, fluctuating popular sentiment! Utterly illogical, brutally oppressive, with no mind nor thought of its own, led hither and thither by charlatans and demagogues ‘clothed with a little brief authority.’ Ah! but those men who rule and ruin down there at Washington will have much to answer for some day! It may not be until the last great day, but the accounting is bound to come. Mary,” turning to his wife, “is it better that we should follow the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

lead of our own minds and consciences, and suffer humiliation and insult and ostracism; or shall we yield to popular pressure, and hide our sentiments, and go along with the shouting, cheering, mindless rabble, and shout and cheer with them?"

"I don't know, Rhett, dear. I don't know anything about it. I try to think it out sometimes, but I get all confused and I stop trying. You know Cousin Henry is fighting with Lee, and Cousin Charley is with Grant in Mississippi. So many Kentucky families are divided that way, and it is n't strange that I should be at a loss to decide. But you've thought it all out, Rhett, and you must be right, and I'll think just as you do, no matter what happens to us. Anyway, so long as I have you and Robert and Louise I shall try to be happy. Where is Louise? I forgot all about her. Louise!"

"Here, mother."

The child had retreated to the corner of the porch when the first sign of trouble ap-

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

peared, and, now that the excitement was over, she was tired and sleepy.

“Come, dearie, it’s long past bedtime. Say good-night to papa and Robert.”

After that, though Bob and his father sat long upon the porch, there was no resumption of conversation. Each was immersed in thought, each was depressed in spirit, and each went to his bed only to pass a restless and troubled night.

The next day but one was the Fourth of July. Early in the morning there came down to the Bannister homestead the dull echo of the firing of the little old village heirloom of a cannon, which the boys had dragged up to the top of a ledge back of the town, and with which they were accustomed, on Independence Day, to rouse their sleeping neighbors. There was to be a celebration at the village, of course. There had been a celebration on the Fourth of July at Mount Hermon from a time whereof the memory of the oldest inhabitant ran not to the contrary. There were to be



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

speeches, the band was to play, the glee club was to sing. All day, in the basement of the town hall, the young ladies were to sell refreshments and fireworks for the benefit of the Soldiers' Relief Fund.

Yet there was no spirit of cheerfulness or rejoicing in the air. The times were too tense. The strain of conflict was too great. The mightiest battle of the Civil War was on at Gettysburg. For two days, across the streets and up the heights of that quaint Pennsylvania village, the armies of Meade and Lee had clashed and striven with each other, until the uncovered dead lay by ghastly thousands, and every hollow in the hillside held its pool of blood. Rumors of victory and rumors of disaster crossed and recrossed each other on the way from the battle-field to the villages of the North. Mount Hermon hardly knew what to believe. She was positive only of this: that two score of her sons were down there in the Army of the Potomac, and that in all human probability some of them, many of



## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

them indeed, were wounded, dying, dead. Whose husband, son, brother, lover would it prove to be, whose eyes would never see Mount Hermon's elms again? No wonder the spirit of anxiety and fearfulness outweighed that of jubilant patriotism on this day.

All the morning the news had been sifting little by little into the village. Toward noon it was certain that out of the stress and horror of a mighty battle had come distinct victory for the Union armies. Lee was crushed, there was no doubt of that. His broken ranks were already in retreat, that too was well assured. From some quarter also came a rumor that Grant, who had been for weeks thundering at the gates of Vicksburg, had broken them down at last, had occupied the city, and that Pemberton's army was his. Yet Mount Hermon did no loud rejoicing. She waited impatiently for confirmation of the news, anxiously for the list of dead and wounded. At two o'clock the stage would come,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

bringing the mail and the morning papers. As the hour approached, the crowd about the post-office grew greater. Not a jubilant crowd, just a waiting, hoping, fearing, intensely earnest concourse of the people of Mount Hermon.

Into this gathering strode Rhett Bannister. It was imprudent and foolhardy for him to come, and he should have known it. Indeed, he did know it. But during the two nights and a day that had passed since the slight put on his boy, since the sons of his neighbors had insulted him at his own home, he had thought much. And the more he thought, the more deeply wounded became his pride, the more restlessly he chafed under the humiliating yoke that had been forced on him, the more defiantly he determined to assert his right to think for himself and to express such opinions as he saw fit concerning public affairs. He felt that he was as much of a patriot, that he had the interest of his country as deeply at heart as any resident of Mount Hermon. Why

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

then should he submit tamely to humiliation and ostracism and maltreatment? And if he chose to go where he had a right to go, on the highway, through the village streets, to the government post-office, to the public gathering in celebration of a day which was as dear to his heart as to the heart of any citizen of the town, why in the name of liberty should he not go? Let the rabble say what they would, he felt that he could defend himself, by word of mouth, with his strong right arm, if necessary, against any blatant demagogue or blind political partisan who might choose to set upon him. In this frame of mind he started for the village, and in this frame of mind he strode into that group of tense, anxious, patriotic men and women waiting for the news.

There were few who greeted him as he pushed his way to the post-office window, and called for his mail. The postmaster handed out to him two papers and a letter. He tore off the end of the envelope, drew out the scrap of paper which had been

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

inclosed, and looked at it. Then his face turned red with anger. Some mischievous, malicious busybody had sent him an anonymous epistle: a crudely penciled picture, a libelous scrawl beneath it, the whole a coarse thrust at his alleged disloyalty. If this had been intended as a joke, he could not have taken it as such. But it was no joke. To him, indeed, it was simply a coarse, brutal, wanton attack on his manhood and patriotism. It started the fires of rage burning with sevenfold heat in his heart. He lifted his blazing eyes to find half the people in the little room staring at him, some wonderingly, some exultingly. Out by the doorway there was a suppressed chuckle. No one spoke. If Bannister had been content to hold his peace, there would have been no trouble. But he could not do that. Only death could have sealed his lips in that moment. He held up the coarse cartoon, with its equally coarse inscription, for the crowd to look at. Then he said, speaking deliberately: —

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

“I observe that you have found a new way to fight the battles of your alleged country.”

For a moment no one replied. Then, from the farther side of the room came the voice of Sergeant Goodman, home on furlough, wounded.

“To whom are you speaking, Rhett Bannister?”

And the reply came, hot and swift: —

“To the coward who sent me this work of art; to you who aided and abetted him, and to all of you who take your cue from the Federal government at Washington, and persecute in every mean and malicious way those who do not believe in wholesale murder in the South and who are not afraid to say so in the North.”

“I don’t know anything about your letter and picture, Bannister,” said the sergeant, “but we who are doing the fighting believe in the Federal government at Washington, we believe that we are carrying on a just war, and we believe that if it were not for

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

you and the rest of your backbiting, disloyal, copperhead crew here in the North, who are giving aid and sympathy to the rebels of the South, we would have had this war ended a year ago."

"Give it to him, sergeant!" cried an enthusiastic listener; "let him understand that it ain't healthy for traitors around here."

"I'm no traitor," responded Bannister hotly. "I think as much of my country as you do of yours. I'll give more to-day, in proportion to my means, to secure an honorable peace between North and South than any other man in this room."

"Hon'able peace!" shouted a gray-haired man indignantly. "Dishon'able surrender you mean. You want the govament to back down, don't ye, an' acknowledge the corn, an' let Jeff Davis hev his own way, an' make a present to 'em o' the hull South an' half the North to boot, don't ye? An' tell 'em they done right to shoot down the ol' flag on Fort Sumter, an' tell 'em 'at Abe



## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

Lincoln's a fool an' a fraud an' a murderer, don't ye? don't ye?"

"That estimate of Abraham Lincoln is not far from right, my friend," replied Bannister. "For it is only a fool and a knave, and a man with the spirit of Cain in his heart, that would plunge his country into ruin and keep her there; that would send you, Sergeant Goodman, and you, Henry Bradbury, and all of us who may be drawn in the accursed conscription that is coming, down to slaughter, without cause, our brothers of the South."

"Look here, Rhett Bannister!"

This was the voice of Henry Bradbury. He stood against the wall with an empty sleeve hanging at his side, telling mutely of Antietam and Libby. "You can't talk that way about Abe Lincoln here. We don't want to hurt you, but there's some of us who've been in the army, an' who love old Abe, an' who won't stand an' hear him slandered; do you hear!"

"Oh, lynch him!" yelled a shrill voice.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Lynch him, an’ have done with it. He deserves it!”

“No, tar an’ feather him an’ send him where Old Abe sent Vallandigham, down among his rebel friends!” cried another.

People were crowding into the little lobby of the post-office, attracted by the sound of angry voices, curious to see and hear, ready for any sensation that might befall. Up near the box-window, white with anger, not with fear, stood Rhett Bannister with clenched hands. In front of him were a score of indignant men, ready at the next instant, if wrought to it, to do him bodily harm.

Then old Jeremiah Holloway, the post-master, puffing and perspiring with his three hundred pounds, came out from his side door and rapped against the wall with his cane.

“This won’t do, gentlemen!” he said. “I can’t have a riot in a govament post-office. You’ll have to git outside an’ have your fun if you want it. I ain’t protectin’ no



## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

copperheads. But I'm goin' to protect my property an' Uncle Sam's if I have to knock down every one of you. Besides, the stage's a-comin' an' you got to make way for the United States mail."

Holloway's appeal for the protection of his property might or might not have had the desired effect, but his announcement of the arrival of the stage called the attention of the crowd to the approach of a four-horse vehicle, already half-way down the square, and people surged out to meet it. For by the stage came papers, letters from the seat of war, sometimes soldiers on furlough, and this afternoon it brought also the speaker of the day, an eloquent young lawyer from the county town, who had already seen service at the front. The band struck up a patriotic air and marched, playing, across to the platform on the green, followed by the girls and boys. The older people remained at the post-office to get their mail. Passengers by stage confirmed the news of the victory at Gettysburg,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

hotly fought for, dearly bought, but a victory nevertheless. They also brought more definite rumors of Grant's probable success at Vicksburg. The letters were distributed and delivered. There were few from the front. The boys who were with Meade had had no opportunity to write that week. But the newspapers were already in the hands of eager readers, men with pale faces, women with pounding hearts.

“Listen to this!” said Adam Johns, the schoolmaster. “Here's what the *Tribune* says: ‘Pickett's division of Longstreet's corps crossed the plain in splendid marching order, driving our skirmishers before them. At the Emmitsburg road they met the first serious resistance. But they stormed the stone fence which formed our barricade, and swept on up the hill under a galling fire from our rifles in front and our artillery on their flank, closing in and marching over their thousands of fallen, up into and over our shallow rifle-pits, overpowering our troops, not only by the momentum, but

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

as well by the daring of their desperate charge. And that charge was met by resistance just as stubborn, by bravery as great, by daring as magnificent. From this moment the fighting was terrible. They were on our guns, bayoneting our gunners, waving their flags above our pieces, yelling the victory they believed they had won. But now came the crisis. They had gone too far, they had penetrated too deeply into our lines. They had exposed themselves to a storm of grape and canister from our guns on the western slope of Cemetery Hill, and, Pettigrew's supporting division having broken and fled, our flanking columns began to close in on their rear. Then came twenty minutes of the bloodiest fighting of the war. Gaylord's regiment of Pennsylvania farmers struck Pickett's extreme left and doubled and crushed it in a fierce encounter. But it was done at an awful sacrifice. Brackett's company alone lost twenty-three of its men, and every sergeant, and Brackett himself was killed in

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

a hand-to-hand encounter with a rebel rifleman — ””

The reader paused, lifted his eyes, and looked fearfully around the little room, peering into the strained faces turned toward him.

“She ain’t here,” said a voice from the crowd.

“God help Martha Brackett!” added another.

But there was a woman there, poorly dressed, pale and shrunken from recent illness, scanning, with dreading eyes, the lists of dead, wounded, missing, with which columns of the paper some one had given her were filled. In the midst of the confusion of voices following the announcement of Brackett’s heroic charge and fall, there was a shrill scream, the paper fell from the nerveless hand of the woman in poor clothes, and she fell, white and insensible, to the floor.

“She saw her boy’s name in the list of killed,” said one who had been looking over

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

her shoulder as she read. Others lifted the poor, limp body and carried the stricken woman into the fresh air to await her sad return to consciousness.

And all this time Rhett Bannister, standing defiantly in his corner, holding his peace, watching the grim tragedies that were being enacted around him, dread echoes of that mighty tragedy of battle, felt the surging tide of indignation rising higher and higher in his breast, until, at last, unable longer to keep rein on his tongue, he cried out: —

“I charge Abraham Lincoln and the Abolition leaders at Washington with the death of George Brackett and the murder of Jennie Lebarrow’s son!”

Then, Sergeant Goodman, home on furlough, wounded, strode forth and grasped the collar of Bannister’s coat, and before he could shake himself free, or defend himself in any way, others had seized his hands, and bound his wrists together behind his back, and then they led him forth, helpless, mute with unspeakable rage.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“What shall we do with him?” asked one.

“Rush him to the platform!” cried another.

And almost before he knew it, Bannister had been tossed up on the speaker’s stand and thrown into a chair, and was being held there, an object of execration to the crowd that surrounded him. He was not cowed or frightened. But he was dumb with indignation that his rights and his person had been so shamelessly outraged. White-faced, hatless, with torn coat and disheveled hair, he sat there breathing hate and looking defiance at his captors and tormentors.

“If this had been in some countries,” said the young orator, looking scornfully down on him, “you would now be dangling at the end of a rope thrown over the limb of that big maple yonder, and willing hands would be pulling you into eternity.”

“And if this were in some communities,” retorted Bannister, “you would be tried

## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

and convicted and legally hanged for inciting an ignorant and brutal populace to riot and murder.”

A tall, dignified, white-haired old gentleman, who had been scribbling on a pad, now advanced to the edge of the platform, holding a sheet of paper in one hand, and resting the other easily in the bosom of his partly buttoned frock-coat.

“Mr. Chairman,” he said impressively, “I rise to offer the following resolution, which I hope will be adopted without a dissenting voice.

“*Whereas*, Rhett Bannister, a resident of Mount Hermon township, and an avowed enemy of Abraham Lincoln and the government at Washington, has publicly affronted the patriotism and decency of this community this day;

“*Therefore*, be it resolved that we, the citizens of Mount Hermon, hereby express our indignation and horror at his conduct, and declare that he has forfeited all right to his citizenship among us, and to any



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

consideration on our part, and that henceforth he shall be and is hereby utterly ostracized, repudiated, and detested by the citizens of Mount Hermon, and that we use all legal measures to drive him in disgrace from our community.

“Mr. Chairman, I move the adoption of that resolution.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the chairman, “you have heard Judge Morgan’s resolution, and the motion for its adoption. Is the motion seconded?”

A hundred persons vied with one another for the honor of being first to second it, and a great, tumultuous chorus of “Aye!” indicated its passage by an overwhelming and unanimous vote.

“And now,” inquired the chairman, “what shall be done with the prisoner?”

“Drive him home with his hands tied, and let the band play him out of town to the Rogues’ March!” cried one.

Whereupon the crowd shouted its enthusiastic approval of the suggestion. And



## NEWS FROM GETTYSBURG

in another moment, helpless as he was, Bannister was pulled from his chair and from the platform, and a dozen willing hands turned his face toward home.

Then, suddenly, a woman stood beside him, and the resolute voice of Sarah Jane Stark was heard:—

“Gentlemen, don’t you think you’re going a little bit too far?”

## CHAPTER III

### A LOVER OF LINCOLN

**T**HERE was an awkward pause. The band, already on its way toward the prisoner, halted. The man who had been pushing Bannister along, loosened his hold. No one seemed quite ready to answer Miss Stark's question. At last, the chairman of the meeting, feeling that the duty of acting as spokesman devolved properly upon him, replied: —

“The man is a traitor, Miss Stark. He is not fit to remain with us. It is for our own protection that we are sending him away.”

Sarah Jane Stark tossed her head scornfully.

“Well,” she said, “I don't see that any of you are in very great or immediate personal danger. And as for bravery, it don't take much courage for fifty men to set on

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

one man and tie his hands behind his back and buffet and abuse him. I've watched the whole thing, and I don't like it. The man made a fool of himself, that's true, and Judge Morgan told him so. Now you're making fools of yourselves, and it's time some one told you so. I thought I'd be the one, that's all."

"But, Miss Stark," persisted the chairman, "he's a copperhead, he's a defamer of the President and the country, he deserves no consideration, either from us or from you."

"Yes," added one in the crowd, "and he's a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, and they plot treason and murder."

Then Bannister found his voice for the first time in many minutes.

"That's a lie," he said. "I'm not a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle. I plot nothing. What I think, I say. What I do, I'm not ashamed of. What you cowards can do to me, I'm not afraid of."

Sarah Jane Stark turned on him savagely.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“You shut up!” she commanded. “I’m doing the talking for this delegation.”

Then again she addressed the chairman of the meeting.

“You ought to know,” she said, “that I’m no copperhead. I detest ’em. You ought to know that with two brothers and a nephew in the Union armies I have some sympathy with the soldiers. And if I ever loved a man in my life I love Abe Lincoln. But there’s nothing I love quite so much as I do fair play. And this is n’t fair play.”

It was strange how quiet the crowd had become. But then, when Sarah Jane Stark had anything to say, people were always ready to listen.

“Now, the best thing for you people to do,” she added, “the decent thing to do, is to loosen this man’s hands, give him his coat and hat, and let him go quietly away to reflect on his monumental foolishness.”

She was already untying the handkerchief that bound Bannister’s wrists together as she spoke.

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

“Folly like his,” she went on, “brings its own reward. Maybe the good Lord wants him for a Union soldier and will supervise the draft to that end. So it is n’t for you to fly in the face of Providence and spoil it all before the time is ripe. And you,” giving Bannister a little push as she spoke, “you go home and get down on your knees and pray for common sense.”

No one else on earth, save possibly his own cherished wife, could have sealed Rhett Bannister’s lips and started him homeward this day. But he had respect for Sarah Jane Stark. Along with his townsmen, he honored her motives, deferred to her judgment, and obeyed her commands. So, almost unconsciously, before he fairly knew what he was doing, before he had time to think whether he was retreating ignominiously from his enemies, or leaving them in disgust, he found himself alone on the highway walking toward his home.

When he reached his house, he found his wife and children all waiting for him on the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

porch. Much as Bob liked music and crowds and excitement, he had not cared to go up to the village to-day, and had induced Louise to stay at home with him. And as for poor Mrs. Bannister, she shrank with dread from meeting any of her neighbors.

The fact that something had happened to him during his two hours' absence Bannister could not conceal. It was too evident, from his appearance, that he had been roughly treated. But neither of his children dared to ask him questions, and his wife contented herself with smoothing back his hair and rearranging his tie, knowing full well in her fluttering and fearful heart, that vengeance had been meted out to him, and that sooner or later she would know the whole unhappy story.

After supper Bob set off some modest fireworks that he had purchased a few days before — two or three rockets, a dozen Roman candles, some pin wheels and giant crackers. And so, as darkness descended,

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

the Bannister family found some little consolation, some little relief from the nervous strain of the last few days, in the temporary pleasure of illuminated patriotism.

Yet, through it all, there was anxiety and apprehension. Wrought up by music and oratory and fireworks and news of victories, there was no telling what excesses the ultra-patriotic, irrepressible young people of the village might indulge in at the expense of a hated copperhead. Every noise from the direction of the town, every sound of hoofbeats on the highway, of footfalls on the side path, sent a thrill to the nerves and a chill to the heart of Mary Bannister. But, as the evening wore on without incident, she began to feel a measure of relief. Then the gate-latch clicked and some one entered the yard and started up the path toward the house. But the suspense of uncertainty lasted only for a moment, for the heavy strokes of the cane on the walk, and the uncertain footsteps, announced the approach of their next neighbor to the east,



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Seth Mills. He was cordially greeted and invited to a seat on the porch.

“I’ve just heard,” he explained, “what happened up-town to-day, an’ I thought I’d come over an’ tell ye —”

“Mary,” said Bannister, “don’t you think you had better take Louise up to bed? It’s getting quite late. You may stay, Robert, if you wish.”

And when the woman and child had said good-night and had gone, he turned to his visitor and continued: “Pardon me for interrupting you, Seth; but you see they don’t know, and I thought it was hardly worth while to have their feelings worked up over it.”

“Jest so! Jest so!” responded the old man. “Protect the women and children. That’s what I say. But they was n’t much I wanted to tell ye, Rhett, only that, accordin’ to my views, they did n’t treat ye right, an’ I’m sorry for it. They ort to be ashamed of it themselves. Mebbe they will be when they’ve hed time to think it over.

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

Me an' you don't agree in politics, Rhett, nor about the war, but that ain't no reason why we should n't treat each other decent. That's what I say."

"And you are right about it, Seth. But I believe that you and I are the only two men in this community who could discuss their political differences without passion. You are of Kentucky ancestry, I am of South Carolinian. These other people here are either of the domineering Yankee type, or else are descended from the stubborn Pennsylvania settlers. Perhaps that accounts for their lack of fairness and reason. I have often wondered how Abraham Lincoln, with his Virginia ancestry, his Kentucky birth, and his western training, could be so narrow, so illogical, so illiberal, so utterly heartless as he has shown himself to be."

"I don't think them are proper words, Rhett, to apply to Abraham Lincoln. I knowed him personally, you know, back in Illinois. I've told you that a hundred times.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

An' I've studied him a good deal sence then, and I've come to the conclusion 'at they ain't no man ever lived in this country who can see funder ahead, an' know better how to git there 'n Abe Lincoln. An' I don't believe no other president, or king, or emperor for that matter, has ever felt on his heart a personal responsibility for his country as Abe Lincoln has felt it, or has strove or struggled or strained or labored or prayed as Abe Lincoln hes, that his country might be saved an' become great an' happy. 'That's what I say.'

"But, Seth, that's mere sentiment. Take the facts. Why can't he see, if he has such marvelous insight, that the South is demanding merely her rights? All she wants now is to be let alone, to take her property and go, to govern herself as she sees fit. And when she is assured that she may do so, this war will cease, peace will come, the horrible struggle will be at an end. Why does Abraham Lincoln persist in striving to compel this brave people, by force of

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

arms, to pass again under the galling yoke of his hostile government?"

"I'll tell ye why, Rhett. It's becuz Abe Lincoln sees better'n they do what's best fur 'em. He sees that ef the South was permitted to go an' set up a separate govamint, an' hev her own institutions an' flag, an' foreign ministers, an' all that, 'at the next thing, by cracky! the Western states 'd want to jine up an' do the same thing, with jest as good reason, an' then the New England states 'd foller suit, an' in less 'n ten years they'd be a dozen different govamints, in place of the old United States, an' they'd be everlastingly at each other's throats, an' they would n't one of 'em amount to a hill o' beans. It'd be rank folly; that's what I say."

"I know, but, Seth, it's not necessary to borrow trouble for the future. If this man would only do what is right and just in the present, the future would take care of itself. It always does. He claims that he wants to save the Union. Very well. There's a way

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

open for him. The South is not anxious to leave the Union. If she were assured of the rights and consideration to which she is entitled, she would stay with us. Abraham Lincoln, by virtue of the power of his office, could secure those rights to her if he would. She must have such voice in the control of this government as she is entitled to have by reason of her ancestry, her intelligence, and her patriotism. And she must have protection for her property at home and abroad, whether that property consists of land, money, or slaves. Give her these things and she would be back with us at once. Oh, if Abraham Lincoln could only see this and act accordingly! If he would only cut loose from the radicals and the abolitionists, and the petty politicians who control him, and who even now treat him behind his back with ridicule and contempt; if he would only heed the counsels of such men as Vallandigham, Fernando Wood, Judge Woodward, and Judge Taney, patriots all of them; if he would even now

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

sue for an honorable peace and strive for a united country, he would get it and get it abundantly. But, alas! your Lincoln, with his assumed simplicity, his high-sounding phrases, and his crafty logic, is, after all, but a coward and a time-server, bending the country to his own selfish ends, plunging her into destruction in order that the bloody zealots at Washington may be satisfied. Oh, the folly, the misery, the tragedy of it all!”

The old man did not answer at once. He sat, for a full minute, looking off to the faint line that marked the western hill-range from the star-flecked sky. Over in the corner of the porch the boy, who had listened intently, breathlessly, to the discussion, moved and drew nearer. From somewhere in the house came the faint music of a good-night song. Then Seth Mills, straightening up in his chair, took up again the thread of conversation.

“I don’t see as it’s any use fur you an’ me to argy this thing, Rhett. We don’t git



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

no nearer together. We've each got our opinions, an' so fur as I can see, we're likely to keep 'em. But you've called Abe Lincoln a coward. Now, I want to tell you somethin'. I knowed Lincoln out there in New Salem when he was runnin' Denton Offut's store. I've told ye that before. An' I've told ye how the Clary's Grove boys come down one day to match Jack Armstrong ag'inst Lincoln in a wrastlin' match. An' how, when Jack tried a foul, Abe got mad, an' ketched him by the throat an' give him the blamedest shakin' up he ever hed in his life. I did n't see that, but I know the story's straight. An' I've told ye how he straddled a log with a rope tied to it, an' pushed out into the Sangamon River at flood, that spring after the deep snow, an' went tearin' down with the current, an' saved the lives o' three men a-clingin' to a tree-top in midstream, an' come near a-losin' of his own life a-doin' of it. I seen him do that myself. An' one night, when we was settin' round the stove



## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

in Offut's store, swoppin' yarns, Jim Haniwell come in considable the worse fur liquor, an' begun a-cussin' an' a-swearin' like he us'ally did when he was drunk. An' some women come in to buy somethin', an' Jim never stopped, an' Lincoln says, 'Jim, that'll do, they's women here.' An' Jim allowed he'd say what he blame pleased, women or no women, an' he did. An' w'en the women was gone, Lincoln come out aroun' from behind the counter an' says, 'Jim, somebody's got to give you a lickin' an' it might as well be me as anybody.' An' he took him an' chucked him out-doors, an' throwed him into the mud in the road, an' rubbed dog-fennel into his mouth, till the feller yelled fur mercy. I seen him do that too. Mebbe I've told ye all these things before, an' mebbe I ain't; but I never told you, nor no one else, what I'm goin' to tell ye now, an' I would n't tell ye this ef you had n't 'a' said Abe Lincoln was heartless an' a coward. It was in that same winter of '32. I was out with the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Clary's Grove boys one night, an' the liquor went round perty free, an' to make a long story short, I was layin' in a snow-bank alongside the road, about midnight, half a mile from my cabin, dead drunk, an' the weather around zero. An' Abe Lincoln happened along that way an' found me. It ain't a nice story, Rhett, so fur's I'm concerned, but I'm a-talkin' plain to-night. He was n't under no obligation to me. I was n't much account them days, anyway. But he turned me over an' seen who I wuz an' what the matter wuz, an' then he twisted me up onto his long back, Abe Lincoln did, an' toted me that hull half-mile up-hill, in zero weather, to my home an' my wife, God bless her, an' he dropped me on the bed an' he says, 'Let him sleep it off, Mis' Mills; he'll feel better in the mornin'; an' when he wakes up tell him Abe Lincoln asks him not to drink any more.' An' I ain't, Rhett, — I ain't teched a drop o' liquor sence that night. But what I want to say is that the man that had strength

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

enough an' heart enough to do that fur me who was nothin' to him, has got strength enough an' heart enough an' grit enough to carry this country that he loves, on his bent shoulders, through the awfulest storm that ever swept it, till he brings it home safe an' sound an' unbroken to all of us. It's a mighty task, Rhett Bannister; but he's a-goin' to do it; I know 'im, an' I tell ye he's a-goin' to do it; an' when he's done it, you an' me an' ev'ry man 'at loves his country as he ort to, is goin' to git down on our knees an' thank God 'at Abraham Lincoln ever lived."

Clear and resonant on the night air the old man's voice rang as he finished his story and rose to his feet. And while his face could not be seen for the darkness, they who heard him felt that it was aglow with enthusiasm and love for the largest-minded, biggest-hearted man that had ever crossed his path — Abraham Lincoln. And Bob, leaning far forward in his chair, drinking in every word of the story, thrilled

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

with the earnestness of the speaker, felt his heart fired anew with reverence and enthusiasm for the great war-president, and with zeal for the cause which he had so faithfully espoused.

Rhett Bannister was too much of a gentleman and too deeply artistic in temperament to try to break with argument or depreciation the force of the old man's recital.

"Oh, well!" he said, rising. "We all have our heroes. This would be a sad world if there were no heroes to worship. And I can't blame you, Seth, for having put a halo around Lincoln's head."

"Thank you, Rhett; good-night!"

The old man limped slowly down the path and out into the road and turned his face toward home. After that, to those who sat upon the porch, the quiet of the windless, starlit summer night was unbroken. Over in the direction of the village an occasional rocket flared up into the sky and fell back into darkness — nothing more.

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

But from that night the dominating personality in Bob Bannister's life was Abraham Lincoln. Look which way he would, the vision of that rugged, kindly face, which he had seen so often pictured, and the tall, gaunt form, stood out ever before his eyes, heroic, paternal, potential to the uttermost. From Seth Mills he obtained a small volume published in 1860 reciting the President's career. And from the same source he got what was much better, that modest, unique sketch of Lincoln's life, written by himself at about the same time for the same purpose. These books he read and reread many times, and the oftener he read them the greater grew his admiration for the one great hero of his thought and life.

In the meantime, under the conscription act of March 3, 1863, put in force by the proclamation of the President, the enrollment for the draft went on. In many of the states the drawings were made in July. On the thirteenth of that month began the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

draft riots in the city of New York, which were suppressed only after the destruction by the mob of much property, after the shedding of much blood and the loss of many lives. The country was deeply stirred. The anti-war party took advantage of the opportunity to denounce the government at Washington openly and bitterly. Only in communities where the sentiment was intensely patriotic was the policy of the draft upheld. Mount Hermon was one of these communities. Already partially depopulated by her voluntary contributions of men to the Union armies, she nevertheless accepted the situation philosophically and cheerfully, believing with Lincoln, that this was the only practical way to put a speedy end to the war.

But to Rhett Bannister this draft was the crowning act of infamy perpetrated by a tyrannical government. His whole nature rebelled against the idea of being compelled, on pain of death, to bear arms against his brothers of the South whom he believed

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

to be absolutely in the right. It was not until September, however, that the drawing for the Congressional district in which he resided, the Eleventh of Pennsylvania, took place at Easton under the supervision of the provost-marshal, Captain Samuel Yohe.

It happened that on the afternoon of the last day of the drawing Bob went up to the village to make some purchases and do some errands for his father. Since his unfortunate experience on Independence Day Rhett Bannister had not often been seen among his neighbors. Aside from a few of the more radical sympathizers with the Southern cause, not many people sought him socially, and by the entire Union element he was practically ostracized.

The condemnation visited on his father Bob could not wholly escape. While there were few who knew of his own loyalty, there were many who knew only that he was the son of Rhett Bannister the despised copperhead. So, in these days, when Bob



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

went up to the village he spent no time in loitering, or visiting, or playing with his former schoolfellows. His errands done, he started without delay on his way toward home.

But, on this September afternoon, there was excitement at the village. For two successive days the names drawn from the wheel at Easton had included but a bare half-dozen from Mount Hermon. And these were the names of men who could well afford to pay the three hundred dollars demanded by the government as the price of their release from service. But to-day, the last day of the drawing, it was more than probable that the number of men drafted from Mount Hermon would be at least doubled.

So, as the day wore on, the crowd about the door of the post-office increased. At five o'clock a special messenger would arrive from Carbon Creek with a list of the men that day drafted from Mount Hermon township, the list having been sent

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

by telegraph from Easton to that station.

When finally the messenger arrived, Bob was listening with breathless interest to a discussion concerning the Emancipation Proclamation, and it was only when he heard some one shout, "Here's the list!" that he realized what had happened.

"Let Adam Johns read it," demanded a man in the crowd.

Whereupon the young schoolmaster, mounting a chair, and unfolding the paper placed in his hands, began to read. And the very first name that he read was his own. He looked out calmly over the group of men before him, his face paling somewhat with the shock of the news.

"I will go," he said. "I ought to have gone before. I am ashamed to have waited for — for this — but — "

"You're all right, Adam!" interrupted some one in the crowd, who knew how the schoolmaster's widowed mother leaned on him for comfort and support, "you're all

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

right. There's a dozen of us here that'll be sons to her when you go."

The young man wiped from his eyes the sudden moisture that dimmed his sight, and went on with the reading of the list. It was not a long one. There were some surprises, but there was no demonstration. For the most part the reading was greeted with the silence of intense earnestness. And the very last name on the list was the name of Rhett Bannister. The schoolmaster's hand grasping the paper fell to his side. For an instant no one spoke. Then a man shouted, "Hurrah for the draft!" and another one cried, "Uncle Sam's got him now!" and then, amid the confusion of voices, men were heard everywhere congratulating one another on the drafting of Rhett Bannister.

With flushed face Bob started for the door, and the crowd parted to let him pass. But outside he ran into a group of his schoolmates, the same boys who had court-martialed him and dismissed him in dis-

## A LOVER OF LINCOLN

grace from their company three months before.

“Old man got struck with lightnin’ this time, did n’t he, Bob?” called out Sam Powers.

“He’ll skedaddle for Pike County when he hears about it,” added “Brilly.” “Better run home an’ tell him, quick.”

“He don’t dare to,” responded Sam. “I’ll dare you,” he continued, shaking his forefinger in Bob’s face, “to go home an’ tell your copperhead dad he’s drafted!”

“Aw, shucks!” exclaimed Bill Hinkle. “You fellows are smart, ain’t you! Let him alone. He ain’t done nothin’ to you. Aw, shucks!”

And then Bob got angry.

“It’s none o’ you fellows’ business,” he said, “whether my father’s drafted or not. You’re bullies an’ cowards, the whole lot of you! Get out o’ my way!”

And so, with flashing eye, heaving breast, erect head, he passed through the crowd of boys untouched. Awed and silenced by his

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

outburst of wrath, they dared not molest him. But, as he went down the road through the gathering twilight toward his home, he began to wonder if, after all, Sam Powers was not right. Would he dare to tell his father?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

WOULD he dare to tell his father about the draft? The question kept repeating itself in Bob Bannister's mind, and the answer to it grew more and more uncertain as he drew nearer to his home. Already he could see the gabled roof of the house, and, back of it, dimly outlined against the gray sky, the white blades of the windmill, free from their lashing, whirling swiftly in the rising wind. The windmill did the work of three men for Rhett Bannister. It sawed his wood, pumped his water, churned his milk, threshed his grain, and drove the machinery by which he manufactured his stock in trade. A few years before the beginning of the war he had secured a patent on a design for a beehive, ingeniously adapted to the instinct of the bees, and so arranged as to

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

make their product removable quickly, easily, and at any time. His success in the manufacture and sale of these hives had been so great that for a time he was quite unable to supply the demand for them. Then the war came, and with it, and as a consequence of it, his ever-growing unpopularity; and, almost before he knew it, his business had so fallen away that it became necessary for him to dismiss his hired help, and he himself had little to do save to manufacture and store his product in hope of better times. Indeed, for the last few weeks the whir of the wheel had been an unusual sound, and Bob wondered as he drew near, that it should be going on this day, especially at so late an hour. So, instead of stopping at the house, he went straight on to the shop entrance, to discover, if possible, the cause of this unwonted activity.

At the bench, in the gloom, he saw his father, fashioning, with the power-saw, a heavy block of wood into the form of a brace. The man did not look up from his



## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

work as the boy entered ; perhaps he did not hear him come.

“I’m back, father,” said Bob ; “I saw the windmill going and I came on over here.”

“Yes ; you’re late. What kept you ?”

“Why, nothing in particular.”

“Were there any letters ?”

Then Bob remembered that in his eagerness to hear the discussion concerning the Emancipation Proclamation, in his excitement over the reading of the draft-list, and in his haste to get away after his father’s name had been announced, he had forgotten to inquire for his mail.

“Why, I — did n’t get the mail,” he stammered. “I — I — did n’t ask for it.”

“Why not ?”

The man laid down his work, slipped the belt from the pulley, and turned toward Bob.

“Because —” replied the boy, “because I wanted to get away.”

“Mean again to you, were they ? Small,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

contemptible spirits! How tyranny in high places is always imitated by the mob!"

"Not so much that, father; but — there was news."

"Oh, news. I see. Was the conscription-list in?"

"A special messenger brought it."

"And did you see it? or hear it read?"

"Adam Johns read it out loud."

And then there was silence between them. The man could not quite condescend to ask for the desired information; the boy could not quite bring himself to the point of volunteering it. So they stood there in the gathering darkness, speechless. Over their heads the great wheel creaked and whirred. And each knew, in his heart, that the other knew that Rhett Bannister's name was on the list of drafted men.

Out in the road there was the noise of wagon-wheels going by, mingled with the talking of men. And then, above the rattle of the wheels, above the creaking and groaning of the windmill, above the howl-

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

ing of the wind, came the voice of one shouting: —

“Rhett Bannister — you copperhead — you’re drafted — thank God!”

That was all. The voices were again silent. The wagon passed on, the whir and wheeze of the windmill never ceased. In the darkness Bob could not see his father’s face, but he knew as well how it looked as though the sun of midday shone on it. And then, involuntarily, from his own lips came the confirmation: —

“Father, it is true.”

But Rhett Bannister did not reply. He stood there in the darkness, dimly outlined, immovable. Still the wheel went round, faster and faster in the driving wind, and the boughs of the maples, bending and springing in the gale, swept and scraped against the eaves of the work-shop. Then the doorway was darkened by another figure. Bob’s mother, peering into the gloom, called out: —

“Rhett, dear, are you there?”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Yes, Mary.”

“Rob has n’t come yet.”

“Yes, mother, I’m here too.”

“I’m so glad! What was it those men shouted, Rhett? Does it mean any harm to you?”

“I hope not, Mary. It was just some wild zealot echoing the sentiment of his crazy masters, that’s all. We’ll go in to supper now.”

As he spoke, Bannister pulled the lever that clamped the wheel, and the whirring and grinding ceased. Then he locked the shop-door and they all went down the path to the house.

At the supper-table the subject of the draft was not mentioned. But, later in the evening, after Bob’s sister had gone to bed, and a wood-fire had been lighted in the fireplace, for it had grown suddenly cold, Rhett Bannister chose to inform his wife of the situation. Try as he might to prevent it, the social blight which had fallen on him covered her also with its sinister darkness.

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

Her heart was deeply troubled. She passed her days in anxiety and her nights in fear. She knew little of the deep undercurrents of political passion and of fratricidal strife that were undermining the bed-rock of the nation. She knew only that she trusted her husband and believed in him, and was ready to endure any suffering for his sake. And while, always, he sought to protect and comfort her, even to the extent of keeping from her knowledge such matters as would give her unnecessary anxiety or alarm, still there were times when he thought she ought, for the sake of all of them, to know what was happening. And to-night was one of those times.

“Sit here, Mary,” he said. “Let’s talk over this matter of the draft. That rowdy shouted, and Robert confirms the report, that I have been drafted. That means that I shall have to go and fight in the ranks of the Union armies, whether I will or no.”

“O Rhett! Do you mean that you have

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

to go as Charley Hitchner did, and John Strongmeyer?"

"Yes, only they were drafted by the state. The government at Washington chooses to take me."

"But what shall I do without you? If they knew how impossible it is for you to go and leave me alone, they would n't make you do it, I'm sure."

"Yes, dear. The privations and sufferings of wives and children are not considered. The administration at Washington needs men to carry on this unholy war, and wives may starve and babies may die, but the war must go on. There, Mary, never mind," as the tears came into the woman's eyes, "I have n't gone yet. Perhaps I'll not go. A man's house is his castle, you know. They'll have hard work to take me if I choose to stay. Well, Rob, who else was drafted? You heard the list read."

"Yes, father, Adam Johns read it. His own name was the first one on it."

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

“Ah! poor old Mrs. Johns. She idolizes that boy.”

“And must Adam Johns go to war?” inquired Mrs. Bannister, anxiously.

“Yes, mother,” replied Bob. “He said he would go. He said he was sorry he had waited for the draft. And Henry Bradbury said he would take care of Adam’s mother. And a lot more said so too.”

“Oh, well!” rejoined Bannister, “such obligations rest lightly on the consciences of those who make them after the excitement and passion have died out. Poor Anna Johns will have to look out for herself if her boy goes. And if he dies, God help her! Who else were drawn, Robert?”

“Why, Elias Traviss. They said he would pay his three hundred dollars exemption money, though, and stay home; that he could well afford to do it.”

“Yes,” said Bannister, bitterly, “there lies the iniquity of the whole proceeding. The rich man may buy his release from service with money; the poor man must pay



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

the price with his body, his blood, his life, perhaps. It's barbarous; it's inhuman!"

Then, all in a moment, Mary Bannister grasped the idea of purchased exemption.

"Why, Rhett!" she exclaimed, "you have that money in the bank, you know. If they come for you, you can pay them the three hundred dollars and stay at home, the same as Elias Traviss is going to do. Can't he, Robbie?"

"Yes, mother, or hire a substitute the same as 'Squire Matthews did."

"So you won't have to go, Rhett, you see, even if you are drafted. And we can well afford the money."

Bannister looked from his wife to his son, and back again, with a smile of pity on his lips for their simplicity. But there was no anger in his voice as he replied:—

"That is true, Mary. Doubtless I could purchase immunity from the draft with money. But my money would be used by me to buy a substitute, or by the government for the purposes of the war, and the

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

moral guilt on my part would be even greater than though I went myself. No, I shall not purchase my release, nor shall I go to war. There are means of defending my rights and my person against this tyranny, and I shall exercise them. I may die in the attempt, but I shall not have it charged against my memory that I fought my brothers of the South with bayonet and rifle, or helped others to do it."

In his excitement, he rose from his chair and paced up and down the floor, but, in a moment, growing calmer, he added: —

"Oh, well! they have n't come for me yet. Let's not borrow trouble. We'll have it soon enough. Keep a stout heart, Mary. And we'll all go to bed now and sleep away our cares."

It was all very well for Rhett Bannister to speak thus lightly of sleeping away cares, but as for his poor wife, she lay half the night, dreading lest the next noise she should hear might be Lincoln's soldiers come to take away her husband to what

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

both he and she considered a cruel, causeless war. Nor did sleep come quickly to close Bob's eyes. Never before had the conflict between parental love and duty and his exalted sense of patriotism been so fierce and strong. Yet, reason with himself as he would, he was not able to convince either his heart or his judgment that his father was right and that Abraham Lincoln was wrong. And as the great War President expounded his thought on the crisis to the American people, and governed his conduct accordingly, Bob Bannister believed in him, trusted him, followed him in spirit, and would have followed him in body had he been of sufficient age to bear arms.

But here and now was the fact of his father's conscription to deal with; a fact which opened the door to untold trouble, to possible, if not probable, tragedy. For Bob knew that in declaring his proposed resistance to the draft his father was not indulging in mere bravado. What Rhett Bannister said he meant, and what he un-

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

dertook to do he did if it was within the power of human accomplishment. So Bob waited in dread for the coming of the officer to serve the notice of the draft.

But when, three days after the drawing, a deputy provost-marshal did come with a conscription notice, neither Bob nor his father was at home. So the notice was left at the house with Mrs. Bannister, and she, poor woman, after contemplating it all the afternoon with dread and apprehension, thrust it into her husband's hand at night, saying deprecatingly, tearfully: —

“O Rhett, I could n't help it! He just gave it to me, and I did n't know what it meant till I read it, and I don't know now, except I suppose it means that you are really drafted and must go to war. And he would n't stay to let me tell him why it was just impossible for you to go, and — and that's all I know about it, Rhett dear.”

Bannister took the notice and read it over. It was simply to the effect that, in accordance with the Act of Congress of

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

March 3, 1863, he had been drawn to serve for three years, or during the war, as a soldier in the armies of the United States. It further notified him to report for duty within ten days from the date of service of the notice, at the office of the provost-marshal for the district, Captain Samuel Yohe, at Easton, Pa. There was an additional notice to those desiring to purchase release from service, to pay the three hundred dollars commutation money to the deputy internal-revenue collector for the district.

When he had carefully read the notice a second time, Bannister folded it and laid it on the desk.

"I have ten days of peace," he said, "in which to prepare for war."

Thereafter he was very busy. He cleaned up many odds and ends of work as though he were preparing for a long journey. Oddly enough, however, he spent much time in making repairs to his windmill. He carried the boxing of the shaft higher above the roof of his shop, closed the top of

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

it over carefully, and made a little window in each of the four sides. He appeared anxious to get it completed before a storm should come up. Little was said about the draft, or about his personal liability for service, and the subject of commutation money, or a substitute, was not again so much as mentioned. But it was with a sense of dread and apprehension that Mrs. Bannister and Bob saw the days go by, saw the preparations going forward for the approaching crisis, noted the fixed lips and the unfaltering eye that always indicated that Rhett Bannister's mind was made up and that wild horses could not drag him from his purpose. Once, the thought flashed across Bob's mind that possibly, instead of attempting to resist the draft, his father had decided to accept the inevitable and report for duty as a soldier of the United States. And the idea sent such a thrill of joy through him, so set the blood to bounding in his veins, opened up to him such a vision of pride and exultation, that it was hard for



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

him to get back to the level of the stubborn fact that all the work being done by his father was being done simply for the purpose of being better prepared to resist the officers of the law.

So, on the evening of the tenth day from the date of service of notice of the draft, Rhett Bannister was still at his home. With apparent unconcern he sat at the table in his sitting-room reading a late copy of the New York *Day-Book*, a violent anti-administration journal which had that day reached him.

"The *Day-Book* is right," he said, laying down the paper, "in declaring that if there was any manhood left in Pennsylvania, her citizens would rise in armed rebellion against the enforcement of this cruel and obnoxious draft as did the citizens of New York city in July. If the army had both ways to face, North and South, the war would soon be at end. Well, I am but one against the powers at Washington, but all the armies of the United States cannot



## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

force me to wear their uniform and bear their weapons against my will.”

By that speech, Bob's hopes, if he still cherished any, were completely dashed. He knew by that that his father would resist the enforcement of the draft to the end, bitter and bloody though the end might be.

The ten days had expired. All the other drafted men from Mount Hermon had gone to Easton. But Rhett Bannister had not responded to the call. Henceforth, by the terms of the conscription act, he was classed as a deserter, subject to arrest, court-martial, and speedy execution. He himself said that a price was now on his head.

Mrs. Bannister went about the house, pale, apprehensive, starting fearfully at every unusual sound, peering constantly up the road, yet in dread of what she might see there.

For Bob, his days were miserable and his nights were sleepless. He turned over constantly in his mind scheme after scheme to

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

save the honor of the family and to relieve his father from the desperate situation in which he had placed himself. But all schemes were useless, impractical, impossible.

On the fourth day after the expiration of the time-limit, a rumor from a friendly source floated down secretly to the Bannister homestead, to the effect that a detachment of United States soldiers, members of the invalid corps, on provost-guard duty, had reached the county seat and were about to start out to round up deserters, and drafted men who had failed to respond. They were likely, the warning went, to appear at Mount Hermon at any hour. Loyal citizens said that Rhett Bannister had reached the end of his rope; and radical Unionists remarked that the end of that rope had a loop in it.

Seth Mills came over that afternoon to have a last talk with his obdurate neighbor.

"It won't do any good, Rhett," he declared. "They're bound to git ye sooner

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

or later, dead or alive. Now what's the use o' bein' so confounded pigheaded an' contrary? Why don't you jest make up your mind to go like a man an' hev done with it, fer your wife's sake, an' your children's sake, an' your country's sake, by cracky! That 's what I say."

And Bannister replied: —

"I would be less than a man, Seth, if I yielded principle and pride, and humbled and stultified myself like a coward, in order to make it easy for my family and myself. No matter what the outcome of this awful struggle may be, no matter what becomes of me in this crisis, I intend that my children and my children's children shall say of me, in the days to come: 'He kept his judgment and his conscience clear.' I will not yield, Seth, I will not yield."

And that ended the argument, and Seth Mills limped back home, discouraged, saddened, angry, that his neighbor, whom he loved for his many kindnesses and sterling character, should be so blind to his own

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

interests, so obstinate, so childish, so utterly unreasonable.

That night, some time after midnight, Bob was wakened from a troubled sleep, more by the feeling that something was going wrong than by any actual noises that he heard. He sat up in bed and listened, and, from somewhere outside the house, the sound of low voices came distinctly to his ears. He leaped to the floor, thinking that at last the provost-guard had come to apprehend his father, and had chosen the night-time for their errand, thinking the more easily to find him. Hastily slipping on his shoes and trousers, he started down the hall. By a ray of moonlight which fell through the hall-window he discovered his mother standing at the door of her room, fully dressed.

“Oh, Rob,” she whispered, “be still! be still!”

When he came closer to her he saw that she had been weeping and that her face was white with fear.

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

"Where's father?" he asked.

"Hush! He's not here. He went out after you went to bed. He's been away all night. Oh, Robbie, look here!"

She took his hand and led him to the window of her room and pointed out into the road. Distinctly, in the moonlight, he saw a man in uniform, carrying a gun, pacing back and forth along the road in front of the house. Then she took him to the hall-window, and showed him another soldier leaning carelessly against the garden fence, with his eyes fixed on the rear of the house.

"There are four of them," she said. "They came a few minutes ago. I saw them come down the road. They have surrounded the house."

"But, father," repeated Bob; "where's father?"

"Hush, Robbie, hush! They won't find him. They think he's here in the house, but he is n't. He left it long before they came."

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“But, where is he, mother? I insist on knowing.”

“Don’t talk so loud, Robbie. You’ll waken Louise. They’ll hear you.”

“Did he go to the woods, mother? to the barn? to the shop? where?”

“Hush! my boy, hush! Don’t whisper it. He went to the shop. He’s in — Robbie, listen, he’s in the windmill tower. He has his gun with him, and his revolver. He’s going to — to —”

She reeled and fell, fainting and exhausted, into the boy’s arms, and he led and dragged her back into her own room, and laid her tenderly on her bed. He chafed her hands and bathed her face, and by and by she returned to consciousness, and told him in more detail of the manner in which his father had left the house, and of the coming of the soldiers. But she never loosened her clasp of his hand until the gray light in the eastern sky announced the approach of dawn.

Then there came a knocking at the hall-

## THE DRAFTED COPPERHEAD

door of the house. Bob released his hand from his mother's, and slipped quietly into his own room and began to put on the rest of his clothes. But, long before he had finished, the knocking was repeated. It came louder, more persistently. He made haste to be ready, but, before he could leave his room, the knocking was again renewed, with strokes that resounded through the house. Somehow it reminded him of the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*, and of the awful tragedy which the opening of that gate was to disclose. What tragedy would follow the knocking at the door of the house of Bannister?



## CHAPTER V

### AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

AS Bob descended the stairs to open the hall-door in response to the knocking, his mother stood on the upper landing, trembling with excitement and fear. When the door was finally opened, she could see, dimly outlined in the doorway, a man dressed in the uniform of a sergeant in the army of the United States.

"We have come," he said to Bob, "by order of the provost-marshal, to arrest Rhett Bannister, who has been drafted and has failed to respond."

The man was courteous in manner, but firm of speech.

"He is not here," replied Bob.

"Pardon me," said the man, "but we believe he is here. He was in this house last night. To the best of our knowledge

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

he has not left it. We shall be obliged to search the premises."

"You may do so," answered Bob, "but I assure you he is not here."

Without waiting to discuss the matter, the sergeant stepped into the hall, followed by a private in uniform. Outside, the house-doors were guarded by the two soldiers who remained.

If Rhett Bannister were within, there would be no chance for him to escape. The sergeant pushed his way into the parlor and sitting-room, threw open the blinds, and looked carefully about him. He went into the dining-room, raised the shades, and examined the pantries and the kitchen. He procured a lantern, went into the cellar and searched every nook and corner of it.

"It is necessary for me," he said when he came back up the cellar-stairs, "to ask permission to go into the second story. Who is up there?"

"My mother and my young sister," replied Bob.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Will you kindly go ahead and tell them that we are coming. I shall have to examine every room.”

“You may go now,” said the boy. “My mother is dressed.”

So they went, all three, upstairs. The soldiers peered into the room where Louise, undisturbed by the noise, still slept peacefully on. In the presence of Mrs. Bannister the sergeant removed his cap.

“I regret this necessity, madam,” he said, “but we are under orders to arrest Rhett Bannister, and it is our duty to make this search.”

The woman was too much frightened to reply, so the party went on into the other rooms, up the ladder into the attic, into all the corners and closets, everywhere. When the search was completed, the sergeant came back to the head of the stairs and addressed Mrs. Bannister.

“You are Rhett Bannister’s wife?”

“Yes,” tremblingly, “yes, I am his wife.”

“I am sorry, but your husband is now

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

classed as a deserter. If he is arrested he becomes subject to the death penalty. I believe that only a prompt surrender on his part will lead to a suspension or abatement of his sentence. If you know where he is I would advise you, for your own sake, to urge him to give himself up at once."

She turned to Bob, appealingly.

"Do I have to tell, Robbie? Do I? Do I have to? Would it be better?"

"No, mother, you don't have to, and it would n't be better. Father has made up his mind what he wants to do, and we have no right to interfere with his plans."

The frightened woman was clinging to Bob's arm and looking up tearfully into his face.

"I am sorry to be obliged to add," said the sergeant, "that all persons who aid and abet a deserter in his efforts to escape arrest, are classed as co-conspirators with him, and as traitors to their country, and are subject to punishment accordingly. So, if

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

either of you have any knowledge as to Rhett Bannister's whereabouts, I —”

But at this point the terrified woman gave way completely; the sympathizing sergeant turned away from her, and Bob led her, sobbing convulsively, back to her own room. When he was again able to leave her and go downstairs, he found that the soldiers had made a thorough search of the out-of-door premises, and were just returning from the shop, the lock on the door of which they had forced, and the interior of which they had explored. Strangely enough, it had not occurred to them to examine the tower of the windmill. There was nothing about it, either in the shop or on the outside, which would indicate to the casual observer that it might become a hiding-place for a fugitive. If it had occurred to them, and they had proceeded with such a search, the tragedy which Bob feared would surely have come. For Rhett Bannister, standing in his cramped quarters within the tower, watching, through his

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

port-hole, the movements of the soldiers about his house and yard, and their approach to the shop, listening to the breaking of the lock on the shop-door, and to the exploration going on beneath him, was ready, on the instant of discovery, from his point of advantage, to shoot to kill any person who attempted to force him from his place of concealment. Yet, for that morning at least, a merciful Providence so blinded the eyes and dulled the wits of those soldiers as to save Rhett Bannister from the disgrace and horror of shedding another's blood.

When Bob came out on the kitchen porch and glanced involuntarily and fearfully up at the windmill tower, he caught a glimpse of a rifle-barrel through one of the small dark openings his father had made, and knew, on the instant, how narrowly the household had escaped a tragedy. For, even as he looked, the soldiers were coming back, by the garden-path, to the house. The young sergeant was plainly disap-

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

pointed and vexed over the result of his expedition. He had hoped and intended to have credit for bagging the most notorious copperhead in that section of the state. And now that his ambition was likely to fail of realization, he could not quite repress his deep feeling of annoyance. He came back to the boy on the porch.

"I don't want to be harsh," he said, "but from either you or your mother I must have definite information as to Rhett Bannister's whereabouts. I believe both of you know where he is."

"My mother is already so frightened by your raid," replied Bob, "that if she knew and was willing to tell, I doubt whether she would be able to. But you may ask me any questions you like."

"Very well. Do you know where your father is at this moment?"

"I believe I do."

"Where is he?"

"I will not tell."

The sergeant's face flushed, and he bit



## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

his drooping moustache. He was plainly angry.

"I have already told you," he said, "that to shield deserters is an offense hardly less treasonable than desertion itself. I don't intend to be balked in this thing. Your father is somewhere about these premises. I know, for I have had the house watched. He could not have escaped. You can point out his hiding-place to me, or I will put you under arrest and take you before the provost-marshal."

The boy's face paled and his lip quivered, but he was still resolute.

"I'll go," he said, "but I'll not tell."

"Very well, come on!"

The sergeant spoke gruffly, and laid a rough hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Let me go first and tell my mother."

"No. It's your choice to go — go now. March!"

Then a better thought came into the sergeant's mind. Down on the Delaware a good and anxious mother was fearing and

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

praying for him. The thought of her softened his anger.

“Well,” he said, “go and tell her. Tell her anything you like. But sooner or later you will tell us what we want to know.”

Bob hurried upstairs to his mother’s room.

“Mother,” he said, “I’ve discovered a way to get rid of these men. I’ve offered to go up to Mount Hermon with them. When we are gone you can let father know.”

“Oh, Robbie! they don’t mean any harm to you?”

“None at all, mother. But tell father — tell father not to go into the windmill tower again. They might find out — somehow — that that’s his hiding-place, and come back here before I do, to get him. Tell him not to go into the tower again, *not for anything.*”

He kissed his mother good-by and hurried out into the hall. His little sister stood there, clad in her nightdress, with flushed

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

cheeks and rumpled hair and wondering eyes.

“Good-by, Dotty!” he called back to her as he hurried down the stairs. “I’ve got to go up to town early this morning. I’m off now. You jump back into bed and get your beauty sleep.”

In another minute he was out in the road with the sergeant and his three men, and they went marching away toward Mount Hermon. The young officer was inclined to be silent and severe at first, but he soon thawed out, and then Bob found his conversation to be most interesting. He said, in answer to the boy’s inquiry, that he had been in the service since almost the beginning of the war. He had been with McClellan all through the Peninsular Campaign. He had fought at Antietam and at Fredericksburg and Gettysburg. In that last great battle a bullet had pierced his thigh, severing a small artery, and he had nearly bled to death before receiving surgical attention. But he was almost

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

well now, and ready again for active service.

And as they walked on, and the young man told of his battles and his marches and his wounds, of the glory of fighting for the old flag, and of his ardent hope for ultimate victory and peace, and above all, of his reverence for the great and noble President at Washington, whom all the soldiers loved and honored, and for whom they would cheerfully have died, Bob felt the tides of patriotism rising high and higher in his breast; and, notwithstanding the errand which the young soldier had tried his best to perform, the boy could not help feeling in his heart that here indeed was a hero worthy of his admiration.

Absorbed in the story, carried away by his enthusiasm for a cause which could command such fealty as this, he forgot, for the time, that his father, a despised copperhead, a fugitive from the execution of the draft, with the penalty for desertion hanging over his head, was still back at the old

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

home, ready to shed the blood of any who might dare seek to apprehend him. He forgot that he himself was under arrest as a traitor, charged with aiding and abetting his father, on his way to the office of the provost-marshal, where he must either purge himself from contempt, by answering the questions put to him, or suffer the penalty of his disobedience. So, with glowing eyes and flushed cheeks and swiftly beating heart, he told of his own hopes and beliefs and desires, of his own longing for the ascendancy of the Union cause, of his faith in the great generals, Meade, Sheridan, Sherman, Grant, and of his absolute devotion to the one overmastering hero of the mighty war, Abraham Lincoln. And when he had told all these things, with an earnestness and enthusiasm that stamped them as unmistakably genuine, and his own patriotism as quite unsullied, it is small wonder that the heart of the young soldier warmed to him, and, before either of them was aware of it, they were the best of friends.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

At a turn in the road the perspective of the long straight street that led through the village lay before them. The leafage of October, red and yellow and glorious along the maple-bordered highway, grew brilliant in the morning light. Back in the valley below them, as they turned and looked, they saw the fog-banks, which had lain heavy and close to the earth, beginning to break and drift away under the influence of the morning sun. The young sergeant bared his head and gazed in admiration at the rolling landscape, as it broadened away to the east.

“Beautiful!” he exclaimed. “Beautiful! I remember a morning down in the Shenandoah Valley when the sun rose on a landscape much like this; and, even in the stress of the work on hand, I admired it and remember it.”

“What was the work, sergeant?” asked Bob.

“Covering the retreat of a beaten army, my boy; one of the gloomiest tasks of war:

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

on every side the evidence of disaster and the wrecks of battle: abandoned cannon, broken wheels, carcasses of horses, the suffering wounded, and the unburied dead. Oh! war is a terrible thing after all — a terrible thing. To-morrow I go back to it. I report for duty to my regiment somewhere down on the Rappahannock.”

Bob spoke up eagerly:—

“Then you won’t be able to go back to — to —”

“To get Rhett Bannister? No. That duty will devolve on some one else now. I must report to the provost-marshal at Easton to-night. It’s too bad I could n’t have had the credit of capturing him, he’s such a notorious copperhead. Oh, I forgot! You’re his son, are n’t you? And I have you under arrest, taking you to the provost-marshal. That’s strange! Why, boy, you are no traitor. I never saw a man more loyal than you are. Indeed, I have talked with few men who know more about the war, the campaigns, and the generals. I



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

never heard a man outside the ranks express more genuine devotion to his country. How is it? What do you mean by having Rhett Bannister for a father?"

"I can't explain it," replied Bob, "except that I know he's honest about it, and truly believes he's right. He's of Southern ancestry, you know. His father was a South Carolinian. I can't blame him. I don't blame him. I've tried to think the way he does about it, and not be against him, but I can't, I simply can't!"

"No, my boy, you can't! But you can tell me where he is. It's not yet too late to get him and reach Carbon Creek for the noon train. Will you do it?"

"No, sergeant, I won't. I'm loyal to my country; but I'm loyal to my father too, and I won't betray him."

"Well, I admire your pluck, but I'll have to take you — Will I, though? — is it my duty? Say, boys!" he called to the three private soldiers who had preceded them; "boys, halt!"

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

The men stopped and wheeled round to face their commander.

“Soldiers,” he said, “you know why I’m taking this boy. I considered his conduct treasonable in not disclosing his father’s hiding-place. But I find that in reality he is just as loyal as any one of us, except that he knows his father’s secret and refuses to give it away. Now what shall we do with him?”

They had reached a point in front of the dwelling-house of Sarah Jane Stark. The men looked in on the smooth green lawn, and then away to the eastern hill range. But before they had made up their minds how to reply to the officer’s question, a woman, coming down the walk from the house, reached the gate where they were standing. It was Sarah Jane Stark herself.

“What’s all this about?” she inquired. “Bob Bannister, what are you doing here with these soldiers?”

“I’ve been arrested, Miss Stark,” replied Bob modestly.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“You? Arrested? Fudge! What does the boy mean?” turning to the officer.

“It means, madam,” replied the sergeant courteously but firmly, “that this boy knows the whereabouts of Rhett Banister, whom we have orders to arrest, and will not disclose them. We are taking him to the provost-marshal.”

“What for?”

“To compel him to tell where his father is, or punish him for his disobedience.”

“Oh, nonsense! The boy is n’t to blame. You’d do the same thing yourself in his place. Besides there is n’t a more patriotic citizen in Mount Hermon township than this very boy. I know what I’m talking about.”

The sergeant doffed his cap.

“I believe you are more than half right, madam,” he said. “I myself am inclined to think that he may do us more good right here at his home, as a somewhat remarkable illustration of patriotism under difficulties, than he would lying in a guard-house living on bread and water.”

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

“Of course he will! Mind you, I’ve no excuses for his fool father. That man’s making the mistake of his life. But this boy is all right. Say, have you had breakfast, any of you?”

“My men and I have not, and I do not think young Bannister has. We will stop at the Bennett House in the village long enough for breakfast.”

“Oh, nonsense! The Bennett House! You come right up here to the Sarah Jane Stark house, and I’ll give you a better breakfast than you’ll get at all the Bennett Houses in the country, and it won’t cost you a penny either.”

She turned up the path as she spoke, and, after a moment of hesitation, the rest of the party followed her. The delay, however, gave the officer an opportunity to make a whispered inquiry of Bob concerning her, and, being thus assured of her integrity and loyalty, he no longer hesitated to lead his little party to her house.

“Now, you go right into the kitchen,”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

she said, "all of you, and wash your hands, and by the time you 've done that, breakfast'll be ready."

And Sarah Jane Stark was as good as her word, and her breakfast was as good as her promises. The pleasant sight of it, and the fragrant odor of it, as they entered the dining-room, was something long to be remembered. When they were all seated she turned abruptly to the sergeant.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Anderson," he replied, "Stanley B. Anderson."

"Well, Sergeant Anderson, you ask a blessing."

The young fellow flushed to the tips of his ears.

"I have never done such a thing," he said. "I beg you will excuse me. At my home my mother always says grace. Will you not say it here?"

"Very well, I will. And I want you all to say 'amen,' every one of you."

## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

So they bowed their heads, and Sarah Jane Stark said : —

“O Lord, make us thankful for this food; confound the enemies of our country, and give us charity in our hearts for all men.”

And every one at the table responded heartily, “Amen!”

It was a delicious breakfast and a delightful occasion. They all said so afterward, and many times afterward. In the hearts of these boys in uniform Sarah Jane Stark found a warm place at once. For they were mere boys — not one of them was over twenty-three, and this woman of middle age, with her big heart, her bluff manner, her solicitude for their comfort, her interest in their stories of the war, her intense patriotism, and withal her broad charity, came suddenly into their lives, like a breath from some bigger, better, sweeter world than they had lived in, and they loved her. And one day, in the following June, after the battle and slaughter of Cold Harbor,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

one of these poor fellows, lying on a rough cot in a field hospital, dying from a dreadful wound, dictated a last letter to his waiting mother at home, and another to Sarah Jane Stark at Mount Hermon. And when she was old and wrinkled and gray, this dear woman, who never had a child of her own, would read over again that brief, pathetic letter from the dying soldier boy of Cold Harbor, and weep as she read.

So, after breakfast, they all went out into the beautiful October morning, and down the footpath to the gate where she had first found them. And she shook hands with every one of the young soldiers, and wished them God-speed, and early and abundant victory, and the blessings of a long peace. Then she turned to Bob and said: —

“Now, you run along back home, and put an end to your mother’s anxiety, and tell your miserable father for me, that the Lord has delivered him this once out of the hands of the Philistines, so that he may enter the armies of Abraham Lincoln like a



## AN UNEXPECTED BREAKFAST

man, and fight for his country as he ought to; and somehow — I can't tell you why, but somehow I have an intuition that he's going to do it."

And the sergeant and the provost-guard stood by and heard her and said never a word.

So they parted. Sarah Jane Stark walked back up the footpath, across the lawn, to her comfortable home. The young soldiers, refreshed, invigorated and high-spirited, went swinging up through the streets of Mount Hermon to their appointed rendezvous. And Bob Bannister, with newer, bigger thoughts in his mind, with his soul filled with larger enthusiasms, with a determination in his heart to break in some way, any way, the galling bonds of disloyalty that girded and girdled his own home, went back free down the road by which he had come an hour before, a prisoner of the United States.

## CHAPTER VI

### A DESPERATE DECISION

**T**HROUGH all of the day following the breakfast at Sarah Jane Stark's house, indeed through most of the succeeding night, the thought and ambition loomed large in Bob Bannister's mind and heart, to lift, in some way, the dark cloud of disloyalty that rested upon the household he loved. His one hour with the soldiers of the United States had inspired and inspirited him to new and greater effort, to the making of any sacrifice, in order to uphold the honor of his country and his home.

In the night an idea came to him, suddenly, brilliantly — he wondered he had not thought of it before. To be sure, there were some details to be worked out, some difficulties to be overcome; but the plan was feasible, he knew that, and, if he could carry it into successful execution, his father

## A DESPERATE DECISION

would have the price lifted from his head, the honor of the family would be saved, and he himself would have the joy of serving his country.

So it was settled and he went to sleep. On the following morning he went up to Mount Hermon and drew from the bank half of his savings. The money was paid to him without question, as his father had long before made formal release of his legal right to it. It was money that he himself had earned, most of it in former years, by carrying the mail from the village post-office to Rick's Corners, the next settlement to the east on the old North and South Turnpike road. But when his father's pro-slavery and anti-war sentiments became pronounced, Bob lost his position as mail-carrier, and a boy whose father had been among the first to enlist as a soldier received the appointment.

As for his morning tasks at home that day, he did them with a vigor and spirit that surprised and pleased his father. In

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

the afternoon he finished up little odds and ends of work that had been awaiting his leisure, and rearranged his small store of keepsakes, treasures, valuables, things that a boy of seventeen has accumulated and looks upon with sentiment. Some articles, outgrown by him or become useless, he destroyed. He appeared to be making ready for a long absence. But he did it all so quietly, with so little ostentation, that no suspicions were aroused on the part of any member of his family.

Then, when everything was done, doubts as to the wisdom of his contemplated course began to assail his mind. What would his father say? What would his mother do? What would his little sister think? The plan that had seemed so brilliant to him in the darkness of the night loomed shadowy and doubtful in the cold light of a dull October day. He began to wish that there were some one whom he could take into his confidence; to whom he could outline the project he had in mind, and from whom he

## A DESPERATE DECISION

could get good and seasonable advice. Well, there was some one. There was Seth Mills. He was old, to be sure; but he was absolutely honest, his judgment was still good, he had always been Bob's father's faithful friend, and his mother's kindest neighbor. Besides, having no children of his own, the old man always had set great store by Bob, and the boy felt that, in any event, he would get sympathy and disinterested counsel. So he went to see Seth Mills. He walked down along the path by the spring-house, and across the meadow, and found his neighbor in the barn-yard milking his cows.

"Uncle Seth," he said, "I've come to tell you what I'm going to do, and see what you think of it."

The old man looked up but did not stop his milking,

"Well, Robbie, what is it ye goin' to do?"

"I'm going to war."

The rich streams that had been piercing the boiling white foam in the milk-pail

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

suddenly ceased. The man's hands relaxed without falling, and he gazed at the boy as if trying to comprehend his meaning.

"You — you goin' to enlist?"

"Yes. I've thought it all out. You know my father. You know what he thinks about the war and about the draft. You know he's been drafted and won't go, and says the soldiers can't take him alive. Well, Sergeant Anderson said that, defying the draft that way, he's classed as a deserter, and when he's caught he's liable to be shot. Now you know that is n't a nice thing to happen to your father. So I've decided to do this. I'm going to Easton to see this provost-marshal and offer to take my father's place as a drafted man, and go wherever they choose to send me, provided they'll let him off. I think they will, don't you?"

For a moment the old man did not answer. He seemed to be trying fully to comprehend the situation. Then, suddenly, he took it in. Rising to his feet as quickly

## A DESPERATE DECISION

as his rheumatic legs would let him, kicking over his three-legged milking-stool in the operation, and barely saving his pail of milk from the same fate, he grasped Bob heartily by the hand.

“Jest the thing!” he exclaimed, “jest the thing! Here I’ve been layin’ awake nights fur a week tryin’ to think up some way o’ savin’ Rhett Bannister’s neck, an’ here you’ve gone an’ struck it the first time, by cracky!”

“You think the plan’s all right, do you, Uncle Seth?”

“Sound as a dollar, my boy, sound as a dollar. They’ll take ye an’ glad to git ye. To be sure, you’re a leetle mite under age, but that won’t make no difference; you’re big an’ strong, an’ you can carry a gun an’ fight with the best of ’em.”

“But, will they let father off?”

“Well, now I sh’d think they would. They don’t want no copperheads in the army, nor no deserters, nor — why, I sh’d think they’d be tickled to death to swap



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

him for you, an' call good riddance to him. That's what I say."

"It looks that way to me, too, Uncle Seth, and I do want to help father and save him if I can."

"Yes, an' they's another thing about it, Robbie. S'posin' ye git to go down there. S'posin' ye git to be one of Uncle Sam's soldiers a-fightin' in the army. You think your father's goin' to set down to hum contented, an' let his boy do the soldierin'? No, sir-ee! that ain't him. You mark my words. In less'n ten days he'll be down there a-tryin' to git to take your place stid o' your takin' his'n. That's what I say. Now, you mark my words!"

But Bob did not quite believe that. The most that he hoped to do was to relieve his father from the effect of the draft and the result of his disobedience to it. More than that, of course, it would give him the opportunity that he had longed for and waited for, to fight for his country and his country's flag.

## A DESPERATE DECISION

So they talked it over, the boy and the old man, and every moment they grew more enthusiastic over the project and what it was likely to accomplish.

“When ye goin’, Robbie?”

“Why, I thought — I thought I’d go to-morrow morning, Uncle Seth. You see I can’t very well let them know I’m going. That would spoil it all. So I thought I’d get up early to-morrow morning and slip away before anybody was up, and catch the early train at Carbon Creek. You don’t think I ought to tell them before I go, do you?”

“No, I s’pose not. But what’ll your ma think when she finds you ain’t to home? What’ll your pa say?”

“That’s the only thing about it that worries me, Uncle Seth. When I’m once in the army, and they know where I am and what to expect, it won’t be so bad. But how to ease their minds before they find out, I don’t know. I’ve thought over it a good deal, but I can’t quite make out how I’m going

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

to do it. I might leave a letter, but then they'd know where I was going and likely stop me before I got there. I might — say, I'll tell you what; I just happen to think of it. Suppose you kind o' happen along there some time to-morrow forenoon, and say to them that you know where I am and where I'm going, and that it's all right; and if I don't come back in a day or two I'll write and tell them all about it. That'll do, won't it?"

"Certain! I'll put their minds to rest. Jest leave that to me. They'll know 't when I tell 'em ye're all right, ye air all right."

Then, for a minute, the old man stood silent, chewing contemplatively on a straw.

"I don't know," he said finally, "as I'd ort to encourage ye in this thing. Mebbe it ain't jest right. It's a-goin' ag'inst yer father's wish an' will. It's a-makin' yer mother an awful lot of anxiety. Mebbe it won't amount to nothin' anyway. Mebbe they won't take ye. Mebbe they won't leave

## A DESPERATE DECISION

him go free. Ef they do take ye, ye go to war, an' ye know, or else ye don't know, what war is. You're jest a boy. You'll hev to suffer. You'll see some hard times. Ye ain't use to it. Likely ye'll git sick. Mebbe ye'll git swamp fever, an' that's bad enough. Mebbe ye'll git wounded, crippled for life. Mebbe ye'll git killed, an' yer body buried in a trench with a hundred others, like they buried 'em at Antietam an' Gettysburg, an' nobody never know where ye lay, nor how ye died. It's awful, war is, it's jest awful, an' ye ort n't to go, unless ye realize what's likely to happen to ye; and I ort n't to encourage ye in goin' unless I'm ready to shoulder the responsibility fer what may happen, an' I ain't quite ready to do that."

"And I don't want you to do that, Uncle Seth. I know what I'm about. I've thought it all out. I've thought about every dreadful thing that can possibly happen to me. But before I get through thinking what may happen to me, I begin to think about what

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

is pretty sure to happen to my father if things go on as they are. And then I can't hesitate any more. To have my father shot as a deserter, why, that would be worse for me, and worse for my mother, and for my little sister all our lives, than it would be to have me tired, or hungry, or sick, or wounded, or shot to death in battle and buried in a trench. And besides that I want to go for the sake of going. I want to do something for my country. Abraham Lincoln wants more soldiers, and if he wants them he should have them. I'm ready to go, and I'm going. I've made up my mind; and you could n't discourage me, Uncle Seth, if you talked a thousand years!"

In the gray October twilight the boy stood erect, with flushed face and flashing eyes. The spirit of the time had entered his soul as it entered the souls of thousands of other boys in those soul-stirring days, and, like them, he was ready. Consequences were of no moment. His country was calling, his response rang fervent and true.

## A DESPERATE DECISION

So Seth Mills spoke no more discouraging words. But he put his hands on the boy's shoulders and looked up into his eyes, for the boy was the taller of the two.

"You're right," he said, "and I'm wrong. I had n't thought it was in ye. Go on. I'll stand back o' ye. God bless ye, I'm proud o' ye!"

Tears came into the old man's eyes as he spoke, and coursed down the furrows in his cheeks, and his own patriotic heart was roused to a new pitch of loyalty.

When, at last, the final arrangement with his old friend had been made, and the little details of his departure were settled, and the good-bys and hand-shaking were at an end, and Bob turned back into the meadow-path toward home, it was almost dark.

His father sat at the supper-table that evening with apparent unconcern. He knew that there were no provost-guards in the neighborhood, no one with authority to arrest or imprison him. For while it was true that, in a sense, he was isolated in the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

midst of an intensely patriotic community, he was, nevertheless, in more or less constant communication with friends and sympathizers who kept him well informed as to the dangers which surrounded or approached him. On this night he knew, for instance, that Sergeant Anderson, with his little squad of soldiers, had returned to Easton, and that no other detail of troops had as yet come into the county. He knew also that means would be found to warn him of the approach of an enemy long before that enemy could reach him. So he ate his supper with his family in peace, and sat quietly at his table reading his paper without apprehension of danger when Bob started to go upstairs to bed.

“Good-by, father!” said the boy, standing at the stair-door with his lamp in his hand.

“Good-by,” repeated his father, “what do you mean by that?”

“Did I say good-by? I meant to say good-night. But you know I never go to



## A DESPERATE DECISION

bed at night any more, father, without thinking that something may happen before morning to separate us — forever.”

His lip trembled a little as he spoke, and he still stood, hesitating, at the stair-door.

“Well, Robert, nothing will happen to-night, I know. You can go to bed without fear to-night. To-morrow, maybe, danger will come again, we cannot tell. But to-night, I believe we are safe.”

He saw that, for some reason, the boy's emotions were deeply stirred, and he imagined it was due to a suddenly augmented fear of what might happen to his father.

“You don't know anything, do you, Bob?” he inquired suddenly. “You have n't heard of danger immediately at hand? Did Seth Mills tell you anything that would lead you to think — ?”

“No, father, oh no! I was just — well, I won't worry about you to-night, anyway. But if anything *should* happen that we don't see each other again — for a good while — I'd like to have you think that while I be-

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

lieve in Abraham Lincoln, and in the Union, and in the war, I believe in you, too, and I would n't want, ever, to do anything that would seem to be disloyal to you."

"No, Bob, of course not. I believe that. I'm sorry these Northern notions of patriotism have entered so deeply into your mind. But, when you're older and understand things better, you'll think differently. There, go along to bed, now. You're tired and nervous to-night. In the morning you'll feel better."

He held out his hand and Bob came over and clasped it tightly.

"Good-night, father!"

"Good-night!"

The boy went on to bed, and Rhett Banister resumed his reading. But he could keep neither his mind nor his eyes on the printed page. He was thinking of his son upstairs. Once a sudden and startling thought came to him, more by way of intuition than suggestion. He dropped his book, rose to his feet, and stood staring at

## A DESPERATE DECISION

the door through which Bob had gone. But a sound of voices came to him faintly down the stairway, natural, reassuring voices, and after a minute he sat down again and took up his book, and whatever apprehensive thought it was that had so suddenly and strangely entered his mind, he dismissed it and resumed his reading.

Upstairs Bob had found his mother sitting with Louise, who had long been asleep, and sewing. It seemed to him that when his mother was not busy about something else she was always sewing. He entered the room where she sat, and looked at her a moment before speaking. The anxiety of the last few months, the harassing dread of the last few days, had worn her greatly and left her haggard and pale. Bob was almost shocked as he gazed on her face under the lamplight. He had never seen her look so before. Would his conduct of the morrow bring to her added sorrow, or intense relief? He dared not stop to think about it then. He knew simply that he

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

was doing right and could not change his plans.

“Good-night, mother!” he said. “I’m going to bed.”

“Good-night, Robbie! Come here and kiss me.”

He went where she was, and leaned over, and she put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him. He started to go away, but at the door of the room he turned back.

“Mother, if anything should happen to-night, — we don’t know what may happen these days, — but if anything should happen, and I had to do something, I don’t want you ever to think but that I felt I was doing the right thing.”

“Yes, Robbie, yes. I don’t know just what you mean, but I know you mean to do what is right. And these are dreadful days, and dreadful nights. I don’t know how it’s all going to end. I’m in terror all the time. I wish your father could do something, or you could do something, or somebody could do something to help us.

## A DESPERATE DECISION

If this keeps on I shall die! Oh, why don't they stop this cruel, *cruel* war!"

Bob went back into the room and put his arms about his mother's shoulders.

"There, mother, there. It's terrible! I know it's terrible. I wish the war would stop. I wish I could do something to stop it. Maybe I can, just a little. But the only way to stop it is to give Abraham Lincoln enough soldiers to defeat the Southern armies. We must do that. At any sacrifice, we *must* do it. And, mother, I shall do my part."

She did not appreciate the significance of his words, but she wiped the tears from her eyes and said: —

"Don't let's think about it any more to-night, Robbie." And she kissed him again, and again she took up her sewing.

Bob went over to Louise, who was stirring uneasily in her sleep, and kissed her gently, and went out into the hall. At the door he turned to look once more at his mother.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Good-night, mother!” he said, “and good dreams. I think we shall all be happier soon.”

He went to his room, removed his working-clothes, put on his best suit, got together a few things and put them into a little hand-bag that had once belonged to his South Carolinian grandfather, put out his light, and threw himself down on the bed for a brief sleep. But he slept only fitfully, looking often at his watch by the light of the moon that shone in at his window; and at last, at four o'clock, he rose for the last time, took his satchel and shoes in his hands and crept softly downstairs. He went through by the kitchen, stopping there to bathe his face and hands, then, sliding back the bolt, he opened the door and stepped out on to the porch. The moon was shining brightly, and the night was very still. There were as yet no signs of morning in the east, nor any noise of stirring men or beasts. He bethought himself of food, but he feared lest, by moving

## A DESPERATE DECISION

around in the darkness of the pantry to seek it, he would arouse some of the inmates of the house. So he closed the door behind him, sat down on the porch-steps and put on his shoes, and then, satchel in hand, he started down the garden pathway to the kitchen gate. The windows of the sleeping-room occupied by Louise opened on this side of the house, but there was no possibility of his being seen by her. Once in the road, he turned his face toward Mount Hermon. When he reached the front gate, he stopped and looked up the path toward the house. From his mother's window shone the faint light of her night-lamp. There were no other signs of life about the premises. Then, suddenly, there in the shadow of the trees, with his boyhood home in front of him, and in the dark west toward which his footsteps were pointing a fate which no man could fathom, a feeling of profound depression fell upon him, a sense of unutterable loneliness and desolation. For the time being all of his cour-



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

age, all of his determination, all of his invincible patriotism, deserted him and left him weak and homesick and miserable. In another moment he would have turned back and sought the safety and protection which his dear home offered him ; but, even as he hesitated, out of the darkness of the east there grew slowly and solemnly clear to his mental vision the tall, gaunt form, the sadly resolute and rugged face of Abraham Lincoln. And, with the vision, there came back into his mind, one by one and then all together, the overpowering reasons that had led him into taking this momentous step. So his judgment returned, his thought grew clear, courage came back to him, and strength, and deep determination, and he turned his face once more toward Mount Hermon, and plunged ahead into the shadows.

## CHAPTER VII

### OFF TO THE WAR

**B**Y the time Bob reached the village the sky was gray along the eastern horizon, and a faint tinge of pink, seen through a gap in the hill-range, announced the coming of the sun. In front of the gate of Sarah Jane Stark he stopped, and looked longingly up at her house. Light shone from two of her lower windows, and a wisp of blue smoke curled lazily from the southern chimney. He thought he would like to go in and tell Miss Stark what he was about to do. He wondered what she would say if she knew. He felt, in his heart, that she would approve his course and bid him God-speed. However, there was not time to visit her. He wanted to get through the village before daybreak, so that he should not be seen of many people. So he gripped his satchel and hurried on. At the next

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

corner he turned out of the main street, and skirted the closely built portion of the town by an outlying way. He met no one whom he knew until he came in again to the main traveled highway beyond the town. This road led directly to the railroad station at Carbon Creek. It had been his purpose to wait here for the stage that left Mount Hermon every morning for Carbon Creek, carrying passengers and mail. But he was in no mood to stand still, and, besides, the chilly October air made exercise a necessity. So he walked quickly along, feeling that the farther from Mount Hermon he could get the safer he would be. It was broad daylight now, and the stage was likely to overtake him at any moment. He began to wonder whom he would have for fellow passengers. But, even as he wondered, a horse and buggy, coming up rapidly from behind, was about to pass him, when the man who was driving turned in his seat and looked back at Bob. When he saw who it was, he reined up his horse and called out:

## OFF TO THE WAR

“Why, Bob Bannister! is that you? Where are you going? Won’t you jump in and ride?”

It was Henry Bradbury who spoke, the crippled veteran who had left an arm at Malvern Hill in ’62, and who had declared that he would gladly have left both arms, or even his life, if only “Little Mac” could have taken Richmond as the climax of that unfortunate Peninsular Campaign. For, somehow, after that campaign, McClellan, whom he, with a hundred thousand other soldiers, had worshiped as the one splendid hero of the war, lost lustre in his eyes, and never regained it to that November night, when, at Warrenton, Virginia, he was relieved from the command of the Army of the Potomac. And yet, to this day, Henry Bradbury will not permit any one, in his presence, to speak harshly of McClellan.

“No, thank you, Mr. Bradbury,” replied Bob, very much confused. “I’m not going far. I was just waiting for the stage to come along.”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Well, if you’re going to Carbon Creek you might just as well jump in and ride with me. I’ve got lots of room and you’ll save your stage fare.”

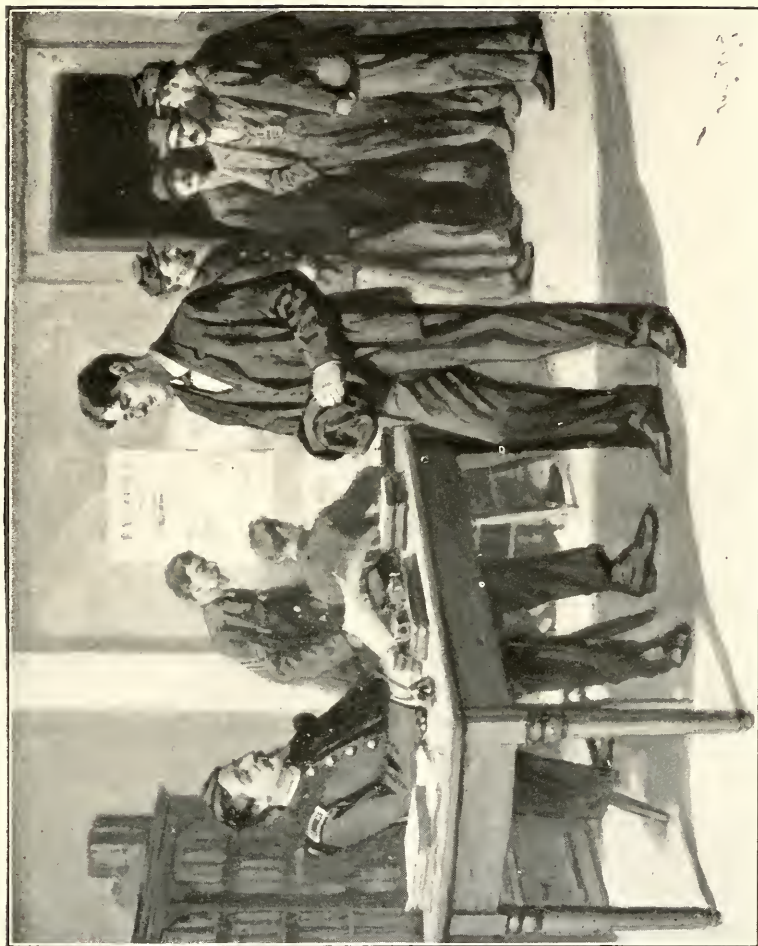
Bob hesitated for a moment. He did not know what embarrassing questions the veteran might ask. Then, suddenly, he made up his mind to accept the invitation.

“I will go with you, Mr. Bradbury,” he said. “I think I would a good deal rather go with you than in the stage.”

He climbed into the wagon and they started on, the old soldier driving with one hand with great ease and facility.

“I might as well be plain with you, Bob,” he said. “I don’t think much of your father, but I’ve got nothing against you. In fact, if what they tell me about your loyalty is true, you deserve a good deal of credit, and I wouldn’t be the last one to give it to you.”

“Thank you, Mr Bradbury! My father and I don’t quite agree about the war, and



“WELL, WHAT’S YOUR CASE?”





## OFF TO THE WAR

about — the draft, but I don't want to set up my judgment as better than his, and I don't want to criticise him, and I'd rather not hear anybody else do it."

"That's all right, my boy. I'm afraid his obstinacy is going to cost him his neck, but I don't know as I've got any call to try to set his son against him. Let's change the subject. Going up to the station, are you?"

"Yes."

"Going to take the train?"

"Yes, I expect to."

After that for a few minutes there was silence. Bradbury looked Bob over carefully to see if perchance there might be something about his dress or appearance to indicate his errand. But there was nothing. Finally his curiosity prevailed, and he said: —

"I don't want to be inquisitive, but may I ask where you are going?"

"I want to go to Easton, Mr. Bradbury."

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

There was another pause, followed by another question.

"I suppose it's none o' my business, but can I inquire if Rhett Bannister has decided to give himself up?"

"I think not, Mr. Bradbury. He don't change his mind very easily after he's once made it up."

The veteran was puzzled. What was Bob Bannister going to Easton for? His visit there must in some way be connected with the provost-marshal's office and the draft. He could have no other errand. Then, suddenly, a light broke in upon Henry Bradbury's mind. He reined his horse up sharply and turned to face the boy.

"Look here, Bob Bannister! are you going to enlist?"

Bob hardly knew how to reply. He considered the question for a moment before he answered it.

"Well," he said finally, "I thought one of us ought to go to the war, Mr. Bradbury."

## OFF TO THE WAR

The man dropped his reins and grasped Bob's hand.

"You're all right!" he exclaimed. "I wish Abe Lincoln had a hundred thousand more just like you. Richmond would be ours in thirty days."

"But, Mr. Bradbury, nobody knows what I'm going to do, and I wish you would n't tell. Maybe I'll not be able to do it, anyway."

"Mum's the word. Don't your folks know?"

"No. I could n't have gone if they knew."

"Certainly not. Well, my boy, Henry Bradbury says God bless you! Do you hear? God bless you!"

So, after the ice had been thus broken, Bob explained fully the project he had in mind; there were a score of things to be talked about, a hundred questions to be asked on either side, and a hundred answers to be given. And before they were quite aware of it they had reached the station at

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Carbon Creek. But the train would not be due yet for nearly an hour. Learning that Bob had not had his breakfast, the veteran compelled him to go across the road with him to the Eagle Hotel.

“Get up the best breakfast you know how for this young man and me,” he said to the landlord. “Ham and eggs and potatoes and biscuits and pancakes and coffee and all the fixin’s. I want you to remember,” he added to Bob, “I want you to remember, some morning when you’re eating hard-tack and salt pork, and drinking black and muddy coffee, — I want you to remember the breakfast Henry Bradbury bought for you at the Eagle Hotel at Carbon Creek the morning you started for the war.”

And Bob did remember it. Many times he remembered it in the days that were to come.

In due time the stage pulled up at the station, the train came in, and Bob said good-by to his veteran friend and stepped

## OFF TO THE WAR

on board. He had but one change of cars to make, the one at Scranton, and, late in the afternoon, he reached Phillipsburg and walked across the river to Easton. The provost-marshal's office was already closed for the day, and Bob had to content himself with finding a modest hotel where he could stay over night and wait patiently for what the morning might bring. After supper he strolled out into the street. Reaching the public square, he saw a hundred newly arrived drafted men formed into a company and drilled in military movements. They were very awkward, indeed. Bob thought that the company of boys at home could have done far better. But, later in the evening, when a body of seasoned veterans, belonging to the invalid corps, reached the city, and marched, with fine precision, up the street to the square, and stacked their arms and were dismissed, he looked upon them with deep admiration. This was something like. The moving ranks, the rhythmic tramp, the glistening arms, the

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

stirring music of the fife and drum, all this had a fascination for the boy such as he had never experienced before. When the troops were dismissed one of the officers, meeting and greeting a comrade on the corner where Bob was waiting, stood for a moment and talked with him.

"Yes," Bob heard him say, "we've got a little provost duty to do up in this end of the state. There were a good many in some sections who did n't respond to the draft. Some of them are already in, the rest we're going to round up. One of the most notorious of these fellows is a man by the name of Bannister. I'm going after him myself, when I get through around here. I'll give him four days from now to make his peace with Uncle Sam, and if he don't do it something will drop. I'm going after him and I intend to get him, dead or alive."

The soldiers passed on, and Bob, pale of face and much troubled in heart, went back to his hotel more determined than ever to take his father's place in the ranks if, by

## OFF TO THE WAR

any possible means, so desirable a substitution could be made.

Notwithstanding his anxiety and the many noises in the streets, he slept fairly well, and at nine o'clock on the following morning he presented himself at the office of the provost-marshal. Many were already waiting to see that officer, and Bob had to take his place in line and await his turn. Most of those who swarmed about the marshal's office were drafted men who were there to urge their claims for exemption from service on account of physical disability. Many were present with substitutes whom they had hired to serve for them. Some who had failed to respond to the notice of draft were being brought in by members of the provost-guard, to answer for their neglect or disobedience.

When Bob's turn finally came and he was ushered into the provost-marshal's office, he did not quite know how to state his errand. A man in captain's uniform sat behind a long table, busily writing.



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

There were two or three clerks in various parts of the room, and soldiers with side-arms stood guard at the door.

The provost-marshal looked up from his writing and saw Bob.

"Well," he said, "what's your case?"

"I have n't any case," replied Bob, "except that I want to enlist in place of my father, who has been drafted."

"Go as a substitute, eh? Well, you want to see Lieutenant Morrison about that, in the next room. Your father is here, I suppose," he added, as Bob turned away.

"No," replied Bob, "he is n't. That's the trouble. Nor does he know I'm here."

The captain laid down his pen and looked at the boy curiously.

"That's strange," he said. "What's the reason he don't know?"

Bob advanced a step closer to the marshal's table.

"Well, he is n't in sympathy with the war. And when he was drafted he would n't report. And when the soldiers came

## OFF TO THE WAR

to arrest him he — they could n't find him."

"I see. And you — why did you come without his knowledge?"

"Why, he would n't have let me come if he knew. And I, I believe in the war. I want to be a soldier. And I thought if I could just take his place so he could stay home with mother and I could go and fight — why, I thought it would be better all around."

"What's your father's name?"

"Bannister. Rhett Bannister."

The marshal's face clouded.

"Bannister of Mount Hermon?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm sorry, my boy, but, figuratively speaking, there's a price on your father's head. He's a notorious rebel sympathizer, a regular secession firebrand. He has declared that the government will never take him alive. Very well, then, we'll take him dead. But we can't afford to accept a price for his freedom. Our orders are to get him,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

and we shall do it if it takes a regiment of soldiers.”

The marshal took up his pen and made as if to resume his writing.

“Then it’s no use,” inquired Bob weakly, “for me to think about substituting for him?”

“Not the slightest, my boy. But if you really want to serve your country, I’ll tell you what you can do. You can enlist. We need men and we’ll be glad to have you. Any recruiting officer will take your application. That’s all, is n’t it?”

“I guess so; yes, sir.”

“Very well, good-morning! Let in the next man, corporal.”

Bob left the office in a daze. The hope that for two days had lain next his heart, was suddenly blasted. He hardly knew what to do or which way to turn. He walked out through the crowd of waiting men, but he scarcely saw them, nor did they notice him. It was too common a sight in these days to see disappointed men leaving the

## OFF TO THE WAR

marshal's office, for any one to comment on this particular boy's downcast look or halting step. He went out into the October sunlight, and, threading his way through throngs of citizens and soldiers, he walked down the eastern side of the public square. Well, it was all over. He had failed. His errand had simply served to emphasize his father's disloyalty. What now? Should he go home, or — The marshal had said something about his enlisting, anyway. How would that work? He had wandered into the street leading to the bridge across the Delaware. Suddenly he was aware that a man in soldier's uniform, whom he had just met and passed, had stopped and turned and was calling to him. Bob faced about and looked. In an instant he recognized the soldier as Sergeant Anderson, who had arrested him and marched him off to Sarah Jane Stark's house for breakfast.

“Are you Bob Bannister?” asked the sergeant.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

"Yes," replied Bob, "and you are Sergeant Anderson."

"Exactly. But what in the world are you doing here?"

"Why, I came here last night to — Well, I might as well tell you; I thought they would let me substitute for my father."

"Oh, no! I don't believe you could do that. Have you seen Captain Yohe?"

"Yes, he would n't let me."

"I thought he would n't. That's too bad after you came all the way here for that purpose. It will be a disappointment to your father, too."

"He don't know I came."

"Don't know you came! Why — say, boy, did you work this thing out yourself? Were you willing to do this?"

"Willing! I'd 'a' crawled from Mount Hermon on my hands and knees to be allowed to do it. I want to save my father, Sergeant Anderson. And I want to help my country. I thought I was going to do both, and now I can't do either."

## OFF TO THE WAR

"That's too bad!"

"Say, do you suppose I could enlist? The marshal suggested that I might enlist."

"Why, yes, I suppose you could. How old are you?"

"Seventeen my last birthday."

"Well, that's a little under age, but I guess you can get in. Uncle Sam needs soldiers pretty bad. I guess they'll take you."

"I believe I'll try it. It looks this way to me. If I get to be a soldier and have a good record, then if they do get father, whatever happens to him it won't be quite so bad for the rest of us if I've proved my loyalty."

"That's right! I don't believe you're going to help him by enlisting, but if worst comes to worst men are going to forget your father's disgrace in thinking of your bravery. Will you do it? Will you enlist?"

"Yes, Sergeant Anderson, I will."

"Then I'll tell you what to do. You go

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

with me. In an hour I shall start back to the South to join my regiment. I'll take you along. I'll get you into my company. I'll get you into my mess. I'll stand by you, and take care of you, and share with you, because you're a hero already, and I'm proud of you!"

The sergeant's eyes dimmed as he grasped the boy's hand and shook it enthusiastically.

"Thank you!" replied Bob. "I'm no hero; and I may disgrace you; but I'll go, and I'll do the very best I can."

"Good! Be at the depot across the bridge yonder in an hour, and I'll meet you there. The train leaves at eleven o'clock."

The sergeant hurried away, and Bob went back to his hotel to get his baggage. It occurred to him to write a brief letter to Seth Mills, and he did so, telling him what had happened at Easton and giving him permission to repeat to his father and mother so much or so little of the information as he saw fit. Then he hurried



## OFF TO THE WAR

to the railroad station and there, promptly at the hour agreed upon, he met Sergeant Anderson. At eleven o'clock they boarded the train for Harrisburg, and from thence, with little delay, they went to Washington. It was late at night when they reached the capital city, and Bob was very tired. They passed through the jostling crowds at the railroad station and sought a rooming house, not far away, with which Sergeant Anderson was familiar, stopping on the way to get a meagre luncheon at a near-by restaurant. They were not long in seeking their beds, and they had no sooner laid themselves down than the young officer fell into a heavy and restful sleep.

But Bob was not so fortunate. The events of the day were still very fresh and vivid in his mind, and he could not readily dismiss the memory of them. It had all been so novel, so exciting, so nerve-racking, for this boy of seventeen, who never before in his life had been fifty miles distant from his native town. Yet he was not

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

discontented or unhappy. On the contrary, so far as the wisdom of his course was concerned, his mind was perfectly at rest. His only anxiety was on account of his father and mother, who would be worrying about him at home. Yet he felt that he had done right. Whatever now might happen to his father, permanent escape from the Federal authorities, or arrest, imprisonment, and death, he knew that his own record as a Union soldier would help to save the family from complete disgrace. Moreover, the ambition of years was about to be realized, he was soon to be enlisted in the ranks of his country's soldiers, and march and fight under the folds of the old flag. So, with this thought in his mind to temper the anxiety for his father in his heart, he fell into a calmer, deeper sleep than he had known before in many months.

It was late when they arose the next morning, and, after a hurried breakfast, went out into the streets. It was Bob's first visit to Washington, and he was deeply

## OFF TO THE WAR

impressed by the sights and sounds that surrounded him. There were many people moving to and fro. Small bodies of troops went marching by. Officers in uniform hurried here and there. Hospital wagons carrying sick and wounded men brought in from the front, went trailing through the streets. Everywhere was noise, bustle, activity, color. Yet nowhere was there gayety. There was no laughter, no lightness of look or word, no care-free expression on the face of any passer-by. For Washington was troubled. Meade, who had been driven back almost half-way from the Rappahannock to the capital, under the repeated onslaughts of Lee's depleted but still daring and determined armies, was just now taking fresh courage, facing his troops about, and turning back once more from Centreville toward the Rapidan. Yet the shadow of unnecessary retreat and imminent danger still rested on the city, and complete confidence had not been restored in the commander and the army that had

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

fought so splendidly and successfully at Gettysburg in July. Even Sergeant Anderson, usually buoyant and light-hearted, seemed to partake of the prevailing depression, and as he and Bob made their way down to the river and across Long Bridge, little was said by either of them.

At the end of the bridge a supply wagon going down to Alexandria came along, and the driver, who knew Sergeant Anderson, gave both men a ride with him to the Virginia city.

Early in the afternoon one of the trains that ran at irregular intervals from Alexandria to the front was made up, and Anderson, having the necessary passports, was able to procure a ride for his companion and himself. At Bristol station he made inquiry and learned that his regiment had gone on to Gainesville, and thence to Auburn, and so the two men followed after on foot. That night, as guests of the rear-guard, they slept, rolled in blankets, in an open field. It was not until late the next

## OFF TO THE WAR

morning that they came up with Anderson's regiment, camped under the shelter of a low hill-range near Auburn.

The sergeant, beloved by the men of his company for his bravery in battle, and his cheerfulness and gentleness in camp and on the march, was heartily welcomed back. And his recommendation of Bob was an open sesame for the boy into the good graces of the entire command. So it happened that, before nightfall, Bob Bannister, duly examined, passed, mustered, and clothed in uniform, became a soldier in the Army of the Potomac.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

**T**HERE was consternation in the house of Bannister. The son of the house had disappeared over night. His mother was distracted, his father was anxious and angry. The morning wore on and he did not return. No one had seen him nor could any trace of him be found. Toward noon Seth Mills came over. He was able to quiet, to some extent, the apprehension concerning the boy. But he would not tell where Bob had gone.

“The boy knows what he’s a-doin’,” said the old man, “and he’s perfectly safe. He won’t git back to-night. He may be back to-morrow night — I don’t know. Ef he don’t come till the day after, I’ll tell ye more about ’im. He’s on the right track an’ he’s able to take keer of ’imself, an’

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

some day ye're a-goin' to be proud o' that boy, both of ye. 'That's what I say.'"

He stood up very straight and rapped his cane three times on the floor for emphasis and turned toward the door. With this statement and this promise the Bannisters had to be satisfied. They knew, from long experience, that the old man could not be forced to tell more than he chose. So the day dragged on. Rhett Bannister had not been so unhappy before in all his life. A dozen times he thought of starting out to find his son, and a dozen times he abandoned the idea. A dozen times he felt that he must go over and choke the truth out of old Seth Mills, and as often he restrained himself. He surmised something of what had happened, and what he surmised hurt and angered him.

The day went by, and the night, and the next day, and Bob did not return. The next night a candle shone all night from the porch-window, that the boy might be guided safely to his door, if haply he should



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

come back, and all night Rhett Bannister lay sleepless and perplexed. The next morning he started out to find Seth Mills. It was the first time in two weeks that he had left his own premises. He met the old man in the road, hobbling toward the Bannister home.

“Seth,” he said, “I want you to tell me where Robert has gone, and I want you to tell me now. Do you hear? *now!*”

His voice rose in anger as he spoke, a look of determination was in his eyes, and the old man knew that the time had come when he must reveal his secret.

“Yes,” he replied deliberately, “I was jes’ comin’ over to tell ye. I think it’s time now ye ort to know. Well, sir, the night before he left, Bob come an’ told me ’at he was a-goin’ to Easton to try to pervail on the provost-marshal there to let him go as a substitute in your place. Ef he ain’t back to-day I expect they’ve let him do it. Now you’ve got it, Rhett Bannister, straight from the shoulder; make the most of it.”

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

For a moment Bannister did not reply. His worst fear had been realized. A great wave of indignation and anger swept over his soul. He stood over the bent form of his old neighbor, white-faced and quivering.

“And you!” he cried, “you of all men, to encourage him, to assist him in this rebellious, this disgraceful, this suicidal folly!”

And again the old man stood up very straight.

“I did encourage him,” he replied. “And I glory in his grit. And ef you hed one drop of human blood in your veins, you’d be the proudest father on the Lord’s footstool to-day.”

Then, lest in his wrath he should wholly forget himself, Bannister turned on his heel and strode away. But he did not go immediately to his home. He felt that he could not yet trust himself to tell his wife. And when, finally, he did go to her he found that she already knew. Seth Mills had been there and told her that since he had seen her husband he had received a letter from Bob,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

saying that he had been refused as a substitute, but that he was about starting to the front with Sergeant Anderson to enlist. Then Rhett Bannister lost entire control of his tongue.

“So,” he said, “the radicals have caught their prey at last. Such Lincoln bigots as Seth Mills and Henry Bradbury and Sarah Jane Stark have drilled into the boy’s mind their brand of pestilent patriotism till they have turned his head and sent him off on this wild-goose chase after glory. Little thought have they for his health or life or the peace of mind of his parents. And when he dies, as die he will, in that awful struggle, his blood will be on their heads. Oh, it’s horrible! horrible!”

He had not thought to give way, like this, to his passion, and the next moment he had repented himself of his anger. His wife had thrown herself into a chair, and, resting her head on a table, was sobbing hysterically. He went over to her and put his arms about her shoulders.

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

“There, Mary,” he said, “there, never mind. We’ll get him back somehow. He’s too young to enlist. They can’t hold him against his will or ours. We’ll get him back.”

And so, little by little, she was calmed and comforted.

Seth Mills had told her that Bob would write as soon as he reached his destination. But the day went by and the night wore away and no letter came. Another day and another night dragged their long hours out, and still there was no letter. Word reached Bob’s parents from those who had seen him on the way to Easton. Congratulations on their son’s patriotism and bravery came to them in almost every mail. Henry Bradbury wrote to Bannister: —

“If you are not proud of your boy, you ought to be. I saw him when he started. A braver boy never left this town. If you hang for treason, he will redeem your family from disgrace. Get down on your knees and thank God for him.”

And some of these darts sank deeply into

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Rhett Bannister's sensitive soul. At times he was wild with rage, at other times he was bowed and silent with grief and despair. His own fate mattered little to him any more. His whole thought was as to when and by what method he could rescue his son from the hateful hands into which he had fallen. But, even as he pondered and grieved, there crept into his heart a softer feeling toward the boy, an almost unconscious sympathy with the enthusiasm, the ambition, the noble unselfishness which had governed the lad's conduct, which had impelled him to seek his father's welfare at peril of his own, which had led him willingly, gladly into the ranks of the Union armies. Indeed, he went so far as to wonder if he himself could by any possibility be mistaken in his attitude toward the Federal government, and his view concerning the conduct of the war. If, after all, there might not possibly be something back of all this attempt at coercion, back of all these vast fighting armies in blue, back of

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

all this lavish expenditure of blood and treasure, some great principle, some high ideal, which his eyes had been too dim to see, but which appealed to the hearts and souls of large-minded men, and fervent patriotic youth, and led them into untold sacrifices that that principle might be upheld and that ideal maintained.

On the fifth day after Bob's disappearance, the boy who brought mail from the post-office to the residents along the North and South Turnpike road, left a letter at the Bannister house, a letter which, at the first glance, Mrs. Bannister knew was from Bob. With trembling hands she tore the envelope apart and drew forth the sheet of paper inclosed. In her calmer moments she could have read the letter without difficulty. Now, the words, strangely twisted and distorted, swam before her eyes, and the whole page was an unsolved mystery. She ran to the door calling to her husband: —

“Rhett! Rhett! Here's a letter — from Rob — come quick!”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

At his bench in the shop he heard her, and hurried to her side. She thrust the letter into his hands.

“Read it!” she exclaimed. “Read it aloud!”

So he read it.

“IN CAMP AT TURKEY RUN, VA.,  
*October 23, 1863.*

“MY DEAREST FATHER AND MOTHER: —

“I know I gave you a good deal of anxiety and distress. I am very sorry for that, but I thought I was doing what was right and now I know I was. I wrote Uncle Seth about it. I suppose he has told you. They would n’t take me as a substitute for father, so I thought I would enlist anyway, and I met Sergt. Anderson at Easton, and he brought me down here and got me into his company. The only regret I have is that father is n’t here with me as a soldier. I am so anxious and fearful about him. It is such a splendid thing to be a soldier of the United States. I am so happy, all ex-



## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

cept about father. We marched here to-day from Auburn. We are in camp here. They say Gen. Meade may take us on down to Fredericksburg and have a battle there. I am very well and happy. Oh, mother, do you remember how the boys would n't have me in the company last summer, and how bad I felt about it? Well, they are still in Mount Hermon playing soldier with wooden swords and guns, and now I am in the army with a real musket and knapsack and canteen, and maybe to-morrow or next day I shall go into a real battle to fight for my country. Oh, mother, I'm so proud of being a soldier. I am in Col. Gordon's regiment, Co. M, Army of the Potomac, Va. Please write to me. I am so sorry I gave you anxiety about me, but I could n't help it. If anything happens to father, tell me. If he could only be here and see things the way I do. Give my dear love to Dottie.

“Your affectionate son,

“ROBERT BARNWELL BANNISTER.”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

When he had finished reading the letter, the man held it in his hand and said nothing. Neither did he see anything in the room about him. His eyes were piercing the distance, gazing on a blue-coated strippling in Meade's army down among the Virginia hills.

The woman was the first to speak. There was no longer in her face the strain of grief or anxiety, the steady look of pain. Her eyes were shining and tearless. Her hands were clasped.

"Rhett," she said, "I'm proud of him. He's the bravest boy in the world. What a splendid, splendid letter!"

For one moment the mother's pride in her offspring asserted itself, the spirit of her Kentucky ancestors shone forth in her countenance, and she spoke the words that came straight from her heart to her lips. Then, suddenly realizing that for the first time in all their twenty years of married life, she had expressed a thought in direct antagonism to the opinion of the husband

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

whom she honored and loved, she sank back into a chair, pale-faced and silent, and let her hands fall dejectedly to her side.

But there was no protest from him. Instead, with a look in his eyes which she could not quite fathom, he came over and sat down by her and kissed her and said:—

“We are both proud of his spirit, Mary, however mistaken his conduct. But he is too good a boy for us to permit him to be lost and destroyed in this awful whirlpool of war. We must get him back.”

Late in the evening of that day there came a knock at the kitchen door of the Bannister house. When the door was opened some one from the outer darkness thrust in a scrap of paper and disappeared. On the paper was scrawled:—

“Rounding-up squad expected at Scranton to-night. Look out!”

When Rhett Bannister read the warning, he said:—

“It makes little difference now. It

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

simply hastens my departure. Doubtless the end will be the same."

To his wife he added: —

"I start to-morrow morning to try to reach Robert. The probability is that I shall not succeed. But the least I can do is to make the effort."

Then, gently, calmly, carefully, he outlined to his wife the plan that he had in mind, and explained to her why there was nothing left for him to do but to try to reach and save the boy. The effort might cost him his life, but to stay at home was likely also to cost him his life, and to attempt to escape from the Federal authorities was utterly useless. There was a wild possibility, the thousandth part of a chance, that he might get to Bob and be able to take the boy's place in the ranks. That was all. And when it was all said, he did not find her nerveless, or hysterical, or in tears, as he had expected and feared, but, instead, in her eyes there was a look of resolution and bravery, across her gentle lips there

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

was drawn a line of courage and determination such as, in all their married life, he had never seen there before.

“I am content,” she said. “I believe you are doing right. Rhett, dear, no matter what happens now, come life or death or desolation, I shall have two heroes to worship and dream of as long as I live.”

Strange it is, and divine, that in a woman so weak so strong a spirit will develop when the right hour strikes.

So, in the bleak darkness of the next morning, at the same hour on which his son had left home scarcely a week before, Rhett Bannister kissed his wife and his sleeping child good-by, and set forth on a mission which, even in his most hopeful moments, promised him only bitter and disastrous failure.

Up the dark road, in the face of the chill October wind, he hurried, into the streets of Mount Hermon, past the home of Sarah Jane Stark, making the same détour around the village that Bob had made,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

coming out into the main road where he had come, hurrying on in the gray light of the morning, toward his hoped-for destination. But, farther on, he left the main highway and struck off across the country by a little-traveled road, expecting to reach a way station on the railroad a few miles beyond Carbon Creek, and there meet the morning train.

In this effort he was successful. He met no one on the way, nor did any one at the station recognize him. But he had no sooner boarded the train than that happened which he might have expected. Soldiers in uniform arose mysteriously and one stood guard at each door of the car, and another one, followed by an officer, came down the aisle and stopped at the conscript's seat.

"Is your name Bannister?" inquired the officer.

"It is," responded the man. "Rhett Bannister of Mount Hermon, at your service; drafted by the government, classed

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

as a deserter, and on my way to join the Army of the Potomac in Virginia.”

“Good! you are our prisoner. Have you any arms about you?”

The officer hastily and skillfully examined the prisoner's clothing.

“I am unarmed and defenseless,” replied Bannister. “I will go with you willingly. I am not disappointed nor surprised. I only ask to be heard by any officer in authority before whom you take me.”

The mode of capture had been simple enough. The provost-guard had only to follow the conscript's trail, to board the train at Carbon Creek, and be ready to apprehend him when he should appear. They did not handcuff him. He was entirely in their power, and it was apparent that he would make no resistance.

And so the notorious copperhead, the man who had denounced Abraham Lincoln, who had ridiculed the draft, who had defied the Federal army, was at last a prisoner of the United States. Within five minutes the



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

fact of his identity was known to every person on the train. Men hissed and jeered at him as he was taken into an adjoining car, and women looked on him with detestation. At a station where a change of cars was made, a sympathizer, with more zeal than discretion, attempted, in a loud voice, to argue justification for the prisoner. But his oratory was soon drowned in a storm of protest, and he himself was buffeted by the crowd till he was glad to escape.

So, all the way to Easton, the despised conscript was mocked and frowned upon. Accustomed as he had been to condemnation by his fellow men, the experience of this day was the most bitter and degrading that his life had thus far known. With little to eat, and no comfortable resting-place, he passed a sleepless night. In the morning he was brought before the provost-marshal.

“Captain Yohe,” said the officer in charge, “this is Rhett Bannister, the Mount Hermon deserter.”

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

The provost-marshal laid down his pen and looked the prisoner in the face.

"Your son," he said, "was before me a few days ago seeking to be substituted in your place. Were you aware of that fact?"

"I have since learned it, sir."

"I understand that he afterward enlisted and is now at the front. Is that true?"

"I believe it is."

"How is it that so unpatriotic a father can have so patriotic a son?"

"I hold myself to be as much of a patriot, sir, as any man in this state. The boy and I take different views of the same matter, that is all. He is young, barely seventeen, and easily influenced by professions of loyalty and the glitter of arms. He has no business to be in the ranks. His place is at home with his mother. I am willing, I desire, to be substituted for him."

"I see. The scheme is a pretty one, but we cannot permit you to purchase immunity from punishment in that way. Neither your son's age, nor his patriotism, nor his

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

bravery can serve to effect your release. You have the standing only of a deserter, you must be dealt with as such. I shall remand you to the officers of the division and regiment to which, as a drafted man, you were assigned. They may shoot you, or hang you, or do what they will with you. I am through with you. In my judgment no power on earth can save you from the extreme penalty meted out to deserters unless it be Abraham Lincoln himself. At any rate, I do not want you longer on Pennsylvania soil. Remove the prisoner."

No wonder Rhett Bannister received little sympathy or consideration at the hands of his captors after that condemnation. Between two soldiers under orders to deliver him to the commander of the regiment to which he had been assigned, he was hustled and hurried on board train, and so off toward Washington.

The soldier guard, at the first opportunity, purchased a pack of cards and a bottle of whiskey. At the station where the next

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

change of cars was made another bottle of whiskey was obtained. The smoking-car in which they sat, and up and down the aisle of which they reeled, was filled with the noise of their harsh orders, their rude quarreling with each other, and their coarse jests at the expense of their prisoner. To Rhett Bannister it was a bitter, a humiliating, a degrading night. But long before the train rolled into the station at Washington, both drunken soldiers had fallen into a heavy sleep. Nor did they awaken when the brakeman announced the station and cried, "All out!"

The few passengers remaining in the car rose to leave. Bannister rose with them. Not so much because he desired to escape from the custody of the Federal authorities, as because he wished to relieve himself of the odious and repellent society of his drunken and disreputable guards.

One man, looking at him askance, said:—

"He ought not to be allowed to get away like that."

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

And another one replied: —

“Let him go. After such a night as he has had he deserves his freedom. But I hope his guards will be court-martialed and shot.”

After that no one attempted to detain him, and Rhett Bannister stepped down from the car, a free man. He walked leisurely up the train platform, across the lobby, through the waiting-room, and out into the street. Over the roofs of the houses to the east the sky was beginning to show the first faint streaks of morning gray. An all-night restaurant at the corner attracted his attention, and it occurred to him that he should be hungry. He knew that he was very tired. He entered, and the sleepy and sullen waiter served him with a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Refreshed, he went out once more into the street. It was very quiet in the city at this hour. Only a few stragglers were abroad and they did not notice him.

When he reached Pennsylvania Avenue

## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

he turned up toward the Treasury building and sauntered slowly on. Not that he cared particularly which direction he took. But, in other days, he had been familiar with the streets of Washington, and some trend of mind or instinct of memory led his steps that way. He knew that he could not permanently escape, that, sooner or later, he would be recaptured and put to his punishment, and that his punishment would be the more hasty and severe because of his temporary freedom.

The hope that he had dared to entertain on leaving home, that he might be permitted to take his son's place in the ranks, had now quite vanished. Before him lay only disgrace and death and a stain on his family name in the North for generations. It was the darkest, most desolate hour his life had known. A small squad of soldiers, in command of an officer, approached him, marching up the street through the crisp morning air in brisk time, swinging their arms in unison as they came, and the thought

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

entered his mind that the best thing he could do would be to surrender himself to them. But when he met them he passed without speaking, and they paid no attention to him. A little farther on a crippled veteran with crutches sat on the curb and asked alms as Bannister passed by. And this hater of the Federal blue thrust his hand into his pocket, drew forth a liberal sum, and gave it to the uniformed beggar, without a word. The man was probably a fraud, but what did it matter? It was doubtless a doomed man's last opportunity to do a charitable deed. So he passed on, up around the Treasury building and along the front of the White House. It was almost daylight now, but the street-lamps had not yet been extinguished, and in the President's mansion two windows were still brilliantly illuminated.

As Bannister reached the corner by the War Department building he turned and looked back at the White House. There lived the man whom he had ridiculed as a



## A LETTER FROM THE FRONT

buffoon, whom he had denounced as a tyrant, whom he had decried as a malefactor. And the remark made by Captain Yohe the day before at Easton came back into his mind: "No power on earth can save you from the extreme penalty meted out to deserters unless it be Abraham Lincoln himself."

So this man held also in his hands dominion over life and death. At his word, spoken or withheld, he, Rhett Bannister, would live or die. At his word, spoken or withheld, soldiers by the thousands had given and would still give their lives that his counsels and his judgments might prevail. What an awful responsibility! How it must weigh on a man's soul! How it must sober him and search him, and drive from his heart all forms of avarice and selfishness and hatred and hypocrisy! How could this man Lincoln, by any human possibility, be anything but honest and humble and God-fearing, with such an awful load upon his mind and heart!

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Involuntarily, as he pondered, Bannister had turned into the park lying between the White House and the War Department and was sauntering leisurely up the path. There was no purpose in it. Doubtless, his thoughts being upon Abraham Lincoln, he was drawn unconsciously toward the physical abiding-place of the man.

And then, suddenly, he became aware that some one was coming toward him down the walk. In the gray light of the morning, under the frost-bitten foliage, a man, tall, bent, with a high black hat on his head, and a gray plaid shawl thrown about his shoulders to protect him from the chill October air, came shuffling down the path. One glance at the uncouth figure, at the deep-lined, careworn face, into the sad and measureless depths of the never-to-be-forgotten eyes told Bannister that the man who approached him was Abraham Lincoln.

## CHAPTER IX

WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

SO this was Lincoln — the man whom, lately, Rhett Bannister had hated above all other living men, at whose door he had laid all the woes and wounds and spilled blood of the nation. Awkward, indeed, he was, with gnarled features, ungainly limbs, and shambling gait. All this Bannister had expected to see. But where was the domineering air, the crafty expression, the pride of power, the ingrained coarseness, for which he had also looked? In that ungraceful form he could see now only the human frame bending under the weight of a mighty responsibility. In the furrowed face, drawn and ashy, and eloquent with suffering and care, in the deep-set, patient eyes, signals of a soul weighed down with sorrow, he could read now only the story of a life untouched by selfishness, of

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

a heart breaking with the burdens and pierced with the griefs of a mighty and beloved nation.

And with the vision of this man before him, so intensely human, so pleadingly simple, Rhett Bannister felt slipping away from him the old hate and scorn and enmity, and into their places came creeping pity for the man, reverence for his sorrow, sympathy with him in the awful burden he was bearing on his bent shoulders and in his mighty heart, the problems, griefs, and cares of his brothers, North and South, engaged in fratricidal strife. It was all in a moment. It followed one look into that infinitely sad and tender face, but in that moment the tide of feeling in Rhett Bannister's mind and heart had turned. Abraham Lincoln was no longer the hated monster of other days, but a man, instead, of like passions, cares, griefs, and hopes with himself; a man to whom it was no humiliation to speak; nay, a man to whom he would dare to appeal in behalf of his

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

son and himself, assured in advance of an honest and sympathetic hearing.

And what was it that Captain Yohe had said?

Bannister uncovered his head, and moved to the side of the path to let the Chief Magistrate by. And, even as he did so, there arose in his heart, and issued from his lips, an appeal which, one week before, he would have scorned to make.

“Mr. President,” he said, “this meeting is by chance, but I beg that you will grant me one moment to hear my case.”

The President stopped and cast a look of sad inquiry on the man who had accosted him. Doubtless, he thought, here was another father come to plead for the life of a son who had been sentenced to a disgraceful death. For what offense this time? Cowardice, desertion, sleeping at his post, or some other crime for which stern war demands stern penalties? They were so common in those days, appeals from fathers, mothers, wives, sweethearts; and

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

the tender heart of Lincoln was daily pierced with them.

“Well?” He braced himself mentally, to listen to some new and agonizing tale of trouble.

“I will be frank with you, Mr. President,” Bannister hurried on, “and brief. I am a Pennsylvanian. I am what is called a copperhead. A few weeks ago I was drafted. I refused to report for service. I have an only son, just passed seventeen, who is as ardent a supporter of the Union cause as I am a detractor of it. Without my knowledge he visited the provost-marshal of the district and asked to go as a substitute in my place. His request being denied, he enlisted. That was four days ago. He is now in Meade’s army in Virginia. Yesterday I left my home, hoping to reach him where he is and induce the officer of his regiment to discharge him and take me in his place. Before I was twenty miles on my journey I was arrested as a deserter. The provost-marshal sent me for condemnation and

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

sentence to the regiment to which, as a drafted man, I had been assigned. Less than an hour ago I reached Washington. My guards were drunk and asleep. I walked away from them and came here. It is by the merest chance that I now meet you. My boy is too young to withstand the rigors and hardships of the service. He should be back home with his mother. I want to take his place in the ranks. Mr. President, I cannot hope to do this unless you will help me."

For a moment the President stood, looking into the eyes of the speaker. Here was a new and novel case. It aroused his interest. It appealed to his humanity.

"Come," he said, "let's go over to the telegraph office. It's too cold to stand here. I was going there anyway. It's all right," he added to two guards who had hurried up. "I want to talk to this man. He's going over to the telegraph office with me."

So the lank, angular, shawl-clad figure moved on down the path, followed by the



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

escaped conscript, while he in turn was followed by the two guards, who watched his every movement. A suspicion entered Bannister's mind as he walked, that the President was leading him into ambush to procure the more easily his re-arrest. The re-arrest did not much matter. But that any one, after looking into this man's face, should think of charging him with duplicity, that did matter. And the next moment the suspicion was effectually cast out.

They went up the steps leading to the War Department, and into the telegraph office which was installed there. Lincoln asked for dispatches left for him by Major Eckert, and read them over carefully. Some of them he read twice. The inactivity of the Army of the Potomac, the apparent inability of Meade to strike a telling, if not a final blow, weighed heavily on his mind. He had come over, as was his custom, in the early morning, to get and read, at first-hand, dispatches from the front.

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

When he finally laid down the yellow slips he beckoned to Bannister to follow him.

"We'll go into Stanton's room," he said; "he won't be here for an hour yet."

So they sat down together in the room ordinarily occupied by the Secretary of War. In the outer office the telegraph instruments kept up a monotonous clicking. Through the open door between the rooms messengers could be seen passing hurriedly in and out. Lincoln stretched his long legs out in front of him and ran his fingers through his carelessly combed hair.

"So you got away from your guards, did you?" he inquired. "Did you say they were drunk?"

"Yes, Mr. President, very drunk. They procured whiskey and drank a great deal on the train coming down to Washington. When I left the car this morning they were sound asleep."

"What are their names? To what command are they attached?"

"I do not know. My name is Rhett Ban-

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

nister, and my home is at Mount Hermon in Pennsylvania."

"I see."

The President rose, went out into the telegraph office, and dictated a message. When he returned and sat down again he said: —

"I've sent out orders to have those men hunted up, arrested, and remanded for trial. The soldier on duty who shows cowardice in the face of the enemy may have some excuse for his conduct. But the soldier on duty who shows cowardice in the face of John Barleycorn must reap the full reward of his cowardice."

He set his lips tightly together, and let his clenched hand fall on the table-top. After a moment he continued: —

"So you are what they call up in Pennsylvania a copperhead?"

"I have been so designated, Mr. President."

"Yes. Well, now, I've been wanting to see some of you copperheads and talk with

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

you, and find out from you, if I can, why you oppose the war, and seek opportunities to stab the administration in the back. I've been wanting to know. Maybe this meeting is providential. Maybe I can learn something from you that will help us all. I've never run across one of you before, face to face, like this. Vallandigham's the only one I know much about, and he's so fiery and oratorical I can't quite get head or tail to what he says. What is your creed, anyway?"

"I can speak for myself only, Mr. President. I am of Southern birth and breeding. My sympathies lie entirely with the South. I feel that they were right on every issue between them and the abolitionists and radicals of the North. I feel that they had just cause to secede from the compact formed by the states, and to set up a government of their own which should be in accord with their views and policies. I feel that the attempt to coerce them was unjust and tyrannical. I feel that the war, on the part of the North, has been and is an awful

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

mistake, criminal in many of its aspects. Feeling that way, I have done all that lay in my power, from my home in the North, openly, and I believe honorably, to oppose the war, and to weaken the power of your administration. I speak frankly because you have asked me for my views."

"That's right; that's right. That's what I want to know. We must be honest with each other. Now, don't you think the Union, as it was, was a splendid aggregation of states?"

"Yes, Mr. Lincoln, I do."

"And don't you think the Union, restored as it was, would be a still more splendid aggregation of states?"

"I do, if the causes of war were removed."

"Exactly! We are trying to remove them. You and your friends of the South are trying to retain them. If their armies prevail in this struggle, the situation is hopeless. Nothing is settled. The Union is shattered. The future is black with trouble. If our armies prevail in this struggle, all the

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

issues that led to the war become dead issues. The Union will be restored as it was. The future will be large with promise. I can see, so far as my vision reaches, but one end that will bring permanent peace and happiness. We must conquer the armies of the South; we *must* do it. The life of the Union, for which our fathers fought, depends on it. There, I've said a good deal. I don't know that I've made myself clear. I don't get a chance to talk to you copperheads very often. I take it when I can get it."

There was nothing flippant or sarcastic in his tone or manner. He was frank and plain, but in deadly earnest. It required no brilliancy of comprehension to discover that. Rhett Bannister saw it and acknowledged it. He saw more. He saw that this man grasped the situation as no man had ever grasped it before. That in his heart the Union was the one thing of prime importance, and that his mind and soul and body were tense with the desire and effort

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

to save the Union. But was he right? Was he right? For, while Bannister could not now but acknowledge the sincerity and skill of the man who was talking to him, he was not yet ready to yield his own judgment.

“I do not think you put yourself in the place of the men of the South,” he replied, “and look at the matter through their eyes. Consider for a moment. You deny them the right to live in new territory of the United States in the same manner in which they and their fathers, for generations back, have lived in their Southern homes. Is that just? They resent that as an indignity. You seek to compel them by force of arms to accept this humiliating situation. They resist. Why should they not? Finally, you yourself issue a proclamation depriving them, so far as lies in your power, of their right to own slaves. Then you demand that they lay down their arms in order to save the Union. Do you think they can greatly care whether such a Union as that is saved or broken?”



## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Lincoln leaned over and laid his hand on Bannister's knee.

“My friend,” he said, “you look at but one aspect of the case. I believe I view it as a whole. You are sincere in your belief. I concede that. The great body of your brethren in the South are sincere. We are both fighting for what we believe to be the right. We both pray to the same God for the success of our armies. We could not do that if we were not honest with ourselves. But I believe I have the larger vision. I believe I see more clearly what will bring about the largest measure of prosperity for all of us. I believe in the Union as it was. I want to preserve it. I want to bring back into it all those states, all those citizens who are willfully and mistakenly trying to leave it, and to destroy it. All that I have done, I have done with that end in view. All that I shall do, I shall do with that end in view. If I have proclaimed emancipation for the slaves, that was the purpose of it. If we must prosecute this war until their last

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

soldier, or ours, is lying dead on the battle-field, that will be the purpose of it. I have declared amnesty to every man in rebellion, save the leaders of the insurrection, who will come back to us and take the oath of allegiance. The purpose of the declaration is to save, to restore, to build up, to make bigger and better and stronger the Union which has been and ought to be more to us and dearer to us than any man or body of men that the nation can produce. That is my one mission, my one purpose, my one hope, and, under God, my one determination to the end."

Into the gaunt, haggard, ashen face came, as he talked, the light of the high purpose that filled his soul. To Rhett Bannister, looking on him, listening in breathless suspense, it seemed almost as though, like the angel at the sepulchre, "his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow." The mighty and homely spirit that had dominated great minds in this tremendous conflict, and bent them

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

to its will, had already laid its spell on the mind of this one-time hater of the nation's chief. Abraham Lincoln stood revealed before him now, not as the ambitious tyrant, the crafty plotter, the traitor to his kind, but as the one man of greatest skill, of wisest thought, of tenderest heart, of largest soul, whom the troublous times had brought forth.

In the silence that followed Lincoln's words, as Bannister sat mute and thrilled, he felt that every heart-beat in his breast was hammering down the last barrier that stood between him and the personality of the great President. Henceforth, no matter how divergent their views, their logic, their ways to conclusions, in the essence of a large patriotism and a great humanity their souls had touched, and they were one.

At length Bannister spoke. It was his last word, his final protest, his weak clutch at the floating, fading straw.

"But the pride of the South, Mr. President; the pride of the South!"

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

Lincoln sat back and crossed his legs, and over his face there came a reminiscent smile.

“Up in Sangamon County,” he said, “when I lived there, I knew a man by the name of Seth Mills. He owned a spring in common with his neighbor Sam Lewis. But they could n’t agree on the amount of water each should have, nor how much could be carried away by trough; and their quarrel over the spring led to a fight and a lawsuit. Well, when I went up to Springfield, the controversy was still on, but Seth was getting a good bit the worst of it. One day he came up to Springfield to see me, and when he came into my office I said to myself: ‘The spring war has reached ‘an acute stage.’ But Seth sat down and said: ‘Abe, I’ve decided to be generous to Sam. He’s licked me in the courts of Sangamon County, but I *could* take the case up to the Supreme Court of the United States and make him a lot o’ trouble and cost. But I ain’t goin’ to do it. I’m goin’ to swaller my pride an’ be liberal with him. Now

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I've proposed to Sam that he chip in an' we'll build the spring bigger an' deeper, an' wall it up, an' put in a pipe big enough to run water to both our houses. It'll cost two or three dollars, but I believe it's wuth it. An' Sam has yielded the p'int and accepted the offer.' "

Lincoln laughed softly and then continued: —

"It seems to me, my friend, that the South can afford to do as Seth Mills did, swallow her pride, be generous to us, get back with us into the Union, and help us build it bigger and broader and deeper, and wall it up, and put in a pipe big enough to supply us all with prosperity and happiness and peace. Maybe it'll cost two or three dollars, but I believe it's worth it."

It was not until the story and its moral were nearly finished that Bannister realized that it was about his own old Seth Mills that the President was talking.

"I know that man, Mr. Lincoln," he said, "I know Seth Mills, and I can well

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

believe and appreciate the story. He has been, for years, my next and most valued neighbor, a good citizen, an honest man, and a worshiper at the shrine of Abraham Lincoln."

"Well, now, I'm glad to hear from Seth; I'm glad to hear from him. I knew he went East somewhere. You tell him, when you see him, if you ever do, that Abe Lincoln sends him greeting and good wishes in memory of the old days in Sangamon County."

Then the light of reminiscent memory died out from the President's face, and the old strained, haggard, weary look came back into it. He straightened up his long body and said: —

"Let's see. You're a fugitive, ain't you? a deserter?"

"Something like that, I believe, Mr. Lincoln."

The President rose and went out into the telegraph office and gave some orders. When he came back he said: —

"I've sent for Lieutenant Forsythe. I'll

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

turn you over to him. He'll see that you get to the right place. Tell me again about that boy of yours, will you?"

So Bannister again told Bob's story, and again expressed his willingness and eagerness to take the boy's place in the ranks.

"I do not feel quite as I did when I came in here, Mr. Lincoln," he said. "I am ready now to concede that the quickest way to permanent peace is by the subjugation of the Southern armies. But, Mr. President, when the South is beaten, I am sure — I am sure you will be charitable."

The President did not reply. He had turned to the table, taken a pen, and begun to write. When he had finished he again faced Bannister, and read to him what he had written. It was as follows: —

“WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.,  
*October 26, 1863.*

“MAJOR-GENERAL MEADE,  
Army of Potomac: —

“This letter will be given to you by Lieut. J. B. Forsythe, who has in custody



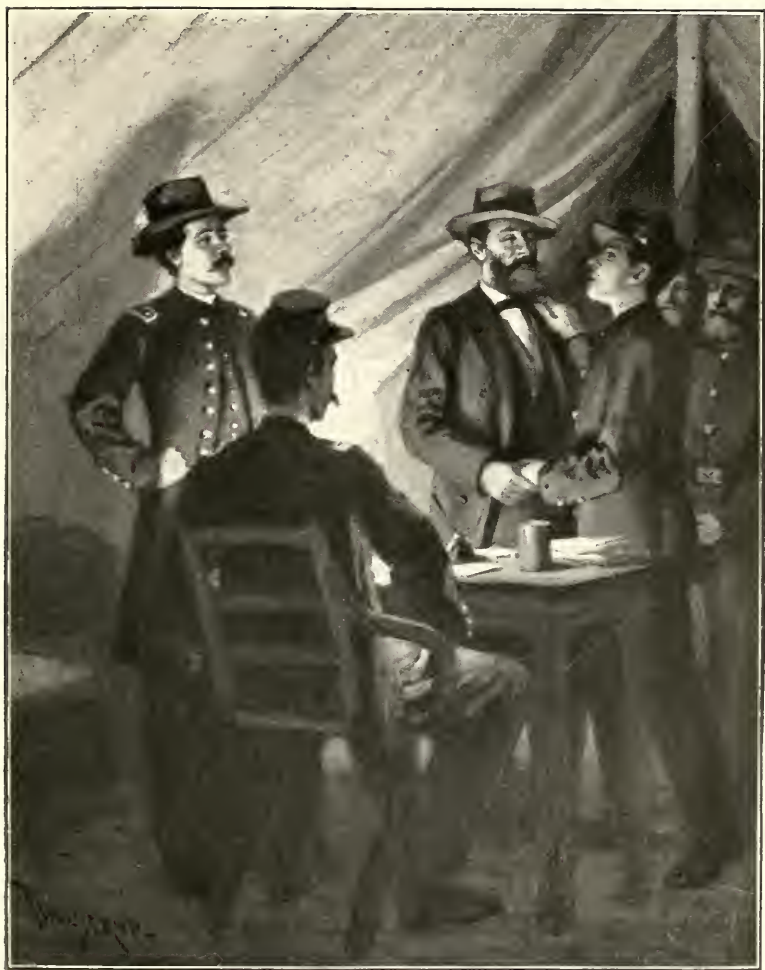
## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

and will turn over to you one Rhett Bannister of Pennsylvania. Bannister was drafted, failed to respond, and was apprehended by the provost-guard. On his way to join the regiment to which he had been assigned he accidentally ran across me. It appears that he has a son, not yet eighteen years of age, who recently enlisted, without his father's knowledge, and is now in your army, Col. Gordon's regiment of Penn. Volunteers, Co. M. Bannister wants to take his son's place, and have the boy discharged and sent home to his mother, who is back there alone. I can see no objection, if it would not be subversive of discipline in your army, to discharging the boy and taking the father in his place. If this meets with your views I would like it done.

“A. LINCOLN.”

He folded the letter, handed it to Bannister, and said:—

“There, you can give that to Forsythe



“FATHER, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?”



## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

when he comes, and he'll take you to Meade; and whatever Meade says must be done must be done. Maybe he'll take you and discharge the boy. Maybe he'll keep you both. Maybe he'll keep the boy and have you court-martialed and shot. Whatever he does you'll have to be satisfied with it. Well, I guess that's all."

He rose to his feet, took his well-worn, high, black hat from the table, and reached out his hand to Bannister, who gripped it, unable for a moment to speak. When his voice did come to him he could only say: —

"Mr. President, I am deeply grateful to you. I came here distrusting and disliking you. I shall leave here — well — I — from to-day I am a Lincoln conscript."

In the telegraph office the President stopped for a few moments to look over late dispatches, and then went out, back through the park and across the lawn, to the treadmill of the White House, there to wear his own life out that the nation which he loved might live.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

While Bannister was waiting for his guard, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, stern, spectacled, heavy-bearded, came bustling in.

“Well,” he said as he espied Bannister in his room, “what is it? What do you want?”

“I am waiting for Lieutenant Forsythe,” replied Bannister, who at once recognized the great War Secretary. “Mr. Lincoln has given me this order.”

As he spoke, he handed the letter to the Secretary, who took it and read it carefully through.

“Another one of the President’s interferences!” he exclaimed impatiently. “He has enough to do at the White House. I wish he would let this department alone. His orders for suspension of sentence, and honorable discharge, and all that, in defiance of the regulations, are absolutely subversive of discipline. They are demoralizing the entire army.”

A young officer had entered while the

## WITH ABRAHAM LINCOLN

testy Secretary was voicing his annoyance, and now stood at attention in the doorway.

“Here’s another order of the President’s,” continued the Secretary, addressing the officer. “He wants you to take this man down to Meade. I don’t know anything about the case. It ought to have gone through this department. I suppose I’ll have to back it.”

He sat down at the table, endorsed the letter on the back, and handed it to the officer, who took it and read it carefully.

“Why is it,” continued Stanton, still voicing his irritability, “that the President always chooses you to send on these irregular errands?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Secretary,” replied the lieutenant, “except that Mr. Lincoln and I trust each other.”

The great War Secretary looked at the officer for a moment, with a quizzical expression in his eyes, then, without another word, he turned to his desk and took up again the herculean task which as a patriot,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

as an enthusiast, as a lover though a critic of Lincoln, he cheerfully and splendidly performed.

So Bannister, accompanied by his guard, went out, along the street, across the Potomac, and down through war-ravaged Virginia, toward the camping hosts of Meade, toward the son who, with a foresight clearer than his own, had preceded him to war. And as he went a new fire of patriotism burned in his heart, a new light of comprehension illumined his mind, and to his list of the world's great heroes was added a new great name.



## CHAPTER X

### FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

FOR three days, Robert Barnwell Bannister had been a soldier of the United States. On the evening of the third day he sat at the opening of his tent studying a small volume of infantry tactics which had fallen into his hands. Inside the tent his comrade and tent-mate, a young fellow hardly older and no less patriotic and enthusiastic than himself, just in from two hours of picket-duty, lay resting on a rude board couch, with a block of wood and a coat for a pillow, singing softly to himself a rude bit of doggerel that had recently become popular in camp.

“Mud in the coffee and niggers in the pork,  
Lobskous salad to be eaten with a fork,  
Hardtack buns — oh, but soldiering is fun;  
Never mind the grub, boys, we’ll make the Johnnies  
run.”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

After a moment he called out: —

“Say, Bob, here’s a conundrum. What’s the difference between a bounty-jumper and a —”

“Oh, button up!” replied Bob, who was studying out a peculiarly difficult infantry formation, and did not wish to be interrupted.

“All right! now you’ll never know,” responded his comrade.

For a few moments there was silence, then the voice in the tent was again heard singing rude rhymes of war.

“We are goin’ to drop our thunder,  
Johnny Reb, Johnny Reb;  
You had better stand from under,  
Johnny Reb, Johnny Reb;  
You will see the lightnin’ flash,  
You will hear the muskets crash,  
It will be the Yankees comin’,  
Johnny Reb, Johnny Reb;  
And we’ll git you while you’re runnin’,  
Johnny Reb.”

Above the tent, below it, all about it,  
from Warrenton to Turkey Run, was en-

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

camped Meade's great army. There were seasoned veterans, raw volunteers, conscript regiments, all accepting and enduring with philosophic fortitude the hardships and vicissitudes of army life. Here and there camp-fires had been lighted, here and there a belated meal was being eaten. It was an hour for rest and relaxation from the stern duties of war, only the picket force being thrown to the front in triplicate lines, to protect the army from surprise.

Bob Bannister looked well in his suit of army blue. He bore himself with soldier-like precision, and a dignity befitting his occupation. Young, enthusiastic, good-natured, intensely patriotic, he had at once become a favorite with the men of his company. His every duty, performed with intelligence and alacrity, marked him in the eyes of the officers as one destined to promotion. As he sat there in the twilight, still studying his book, an orderly approached him and inquired: —

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“Are you private Bannister?”

“That is my name.”

“You are wanted at company headquarters.”

Wondering what it could mean, private Bannister laid aside his book and went with the orderly up the company street to the captain's quarters. Inside the tent a candle was burning on a rude table by which the captain was seated. Standing about, against the inner walls, were a half-dozen men whose faces the boy could not recognize in the semi-darkness.

Bob advanced to within a few paces of the table, saluted, and stood at attention.

“Private Bannister,” said the captain, “I want to know if you recognize this person?”

He nodded, as he spoke, toward a man dressed in civilian costume, standing near the entrance to the tent. Bob turned and peered into the shadows. The man stepped forward.

“Father!”

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

“Rob!”

And then Bob rushed into his father's arms.

For a moment no one spoke. But the soldiers who saw the meeting never forgot it.

“Father, what does it mean?”

Bannister, his voice lost in emotion and his eyes dim with tears, pointed to a paper lying on the captain's table. He had tried to imagine how Bob would look in uniform, but he had not thought to see quite so straight, manly a figure, clear of eye, handsome of countenance, “every inch a soldier.” And the words of Mary Bannister, when he read Bob's letter to her, came back into his mind and voiced his sentiment: “I'm proud of him. He's the bravest boy in the world.”

“Private Bannister,” said the captain, “your father is here in custody of Lieutenant Forsythe of the regular army, who brings with him this letter.”

The captain then read impressively, with

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

a sense of its true importance, the President's letter to General Meade. When he reached the end and read the name "A. Lincoln," every man in the tent lifted his cap reverently from his head.

"This communication," continued the captain, "was delivered to the general commanding, by him endorsed and delivered to the division commander, then to the commander of our brigade, to the colonel of the regiment, and in due course has reached me. It has been endorsed as follows by all the officers through whose hands it has passed: 'If not prejudicial to the service, let the President's wish be carried out.' There is therefore nothing left for me to do except to give the order for your discharge, and the mustering in of your father to take your place. Permit me to add, however, that we shall regret to lose you. During your brief term of service you have been a good soldier, a credit to the company and the army."

In the silence that followed, the captain

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

half rose from the table as if to close the interview. Then Bob found his voice.

"But, Captain Howarth," he said, "I don't want to be discharged. I don't want to go home. I want to stay. I am old enough. I can march. I can do picket-duty. I can fight. But I can't go back home now, it's simply impossible."

The captain dropped back into his seat, incredulous. Among the men standing against the tent-wall there was a buzz of approving voices. Rhett Bannister put his arm about the boy's shoulders affectionately.

"You're right, my son," he said. "You're right. I should n't have asked it. I did n't think. I did n't realize; but — you're right."

Then Lieutenant Forsythe stepped forward.

"Permit me," he said, "to make a suggestion. I talked much with this man on my way down here. I believe he will make a good and earnest soldier. The son has



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

already proved his ability and patriotism. Why not keep them both? I am sure it will not militate against the spirit of the President's order."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Sergeant Anderson, stepping out from the shadow where he had stood dreading lest he should lose his protégé, of whom he had grown wondrously fond.

"Good!" said the other men.

"Let it be done," responded the captain. And it was done.

In less than two hours Rhett Bannister was also a soldier of the United States. And so he and his son served their country in the ranks. They ate by the same camp-fire, slept in the same rude tent, and marched, shoulder to shoulder, through the autumn mists and the winter slush and mud of old Virginia. At Mine Run, a month after they were sworn in, they had their first baptism of fire, and bore themselves with such coolness and bravery as to elicit compliments for both from Cap-

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

tain Howarth. In winter-quarters, with the monotony of camp-life and the round of daily duties pressing on them, their spirits never flagged. Both by precept and example they radiated courage and cheerfulness to all their company. When, occasionally, a spirit of dissatisfaction showed itself in the ranks, when impatience with those in command became manifest, when poor and scanty fare and wretched clothing were the rule, it was Rhett Bannister, cool and logical, free of speech and earnest in manner, who moved among the men and counseled patience, who pointed out to them their duty and appealed to their patriotism, and never without success. "His influence with the soldiers," said Captain Howarth, one day, "is worth a thousand courts-martial."

There was one time in particular when murmurings of discontent broke forth, when the winter rains of Virginia were coldest and most piercing; when food was scarce and foraging forbidden; when Meade,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

under whom the soldiers had fought at Gettysburg, was discredited and displaced, and Grant, whom they did not know, was given supreme command ; when the authorities at Washington seemed stricken with lethargy and blindness, and the anti-war sentiment in the North, increasing with dangerous rapidity, came filtering down to ears and hearts in the ranks not unwilling to receive it. Then it was that Rhett Bannister, the one-time hater of the administration, detractor of the army, denouncer of the war, went out among his comrades, from man to man, from tent to tent, from company to company, urging duty, pleading patriotism, counseling patience.

“You think you have troubles,” he said one night to a group of murmuring men, crowded into a smoky tent, while the cold rain dripped through the tattered canvas, and the wind howled dismally among the pines outside. “You think you have hardships and burdens and afflictions in the

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

service of your country. Let me tell you something. I have seen Abraham Lincoln. I have talked with him face to face. I have read in his sad eyes and hollow cheeks, and the lines creasing his forehead, the story of his suffering. Boys, that man is bearing the burdens of this country and the woes of her people on his heart. Every drop of blood that is shed is as though it came from his body, every groan of a wounded soldier is as though it came from his lips, every tear from the eyes of those left desolate is as though it furrowed his face. You cannot conceive the immensity of the burdens he is bearing, or the weight of suffering he endures. Yet he is patiently, faithfully, earnestly, prayerfully, with tremendous power of will and strength of soul, pressing on toward the hoped-for end, and by God's grace he is going soon to bring us all back out of the shadows of war into the light of a victorious peace. Boys, when you think you have burdens to bear, remember Abraham Lincoln."

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

And they did. No man who heard those impassioned words that night ever again opened his lips in complaint of his commanders.

Letters came from Mount Hermon almost daily, sometimes a half-dozen in a bunch. People up there wanted Rhett Bannister and his son to know that they were appreciated at home. But the letters that came from Mary Bannister, strong, cheerful, splendid letters, were the ones that brought most joy to the hearts of their recipients. At last she felt that the ban had been lifted, and that she was once more a woman among women. She was not insensible, indeed, to the dangers that surrounded her loved ones night and day. She knew well enough that any mail might bring her terrible tidings about one or both of them. But such anxiety was as nothing to the agony of mind she had endured through many weeks before her son and husband went down to the war. And as there drifted up to her ears now and again

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

news of the brave conduct and manly bearing of those so near and dear to her, she went about her household labors, happy in the thought that from this time forth she could look any man or woman in the face and say: "Behold my heroes!"

One day there came down to Rhett Bannister a letter from Sarah Jane Stark. A wise, impetuous, laudatory letter, such as no one on earth could write save Sarah Jane Stark herself. Over the first two pages Bannister laughed like a boy, but when he had finished the last line of the letter, tears were streaming down his face.

"To think," she wrote, "that the one-time copperhead of Mount Hermon is serving his country in the ranks. I would give Billy my cat to see you in your blue uniform, and you know how much I love Billy. And that dear boy! I never cried about a boy in my life before, you know that; but I cry about that boy of yours every time I hear from him! I'm so proud of him, and so fond of him! Heaven bless both of you!"



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

And down at the end of the letter a post-script was hidden away. It said: —

“I’ve induced Mary Bannister to come up to town with Louise and live with me this winter. It’ll be pretty lonely down at your place, and I’ve got a big house and plenty of room, and I want company, and I want her. She’s such a dear, brave, patient little woman, and we’ll have a glorious time together.”

So, with no disquietude on account of their loved ones at home on their minds, Rhett Bannister and his son faced the enemy and, with their comrades in arms, fared on.

When Grant, in the spring of ’64, began his arduous and bloody campaign from the Rappahannock to the Rapidan and from the Rapidan to the James, they were in the forefront of the conflict. Yet they seemed to lead charmed lives. Out from the tangled depths and thousand pitfalls of The Wilderness, from the forest scarred and seamed across with fire and shell and bullet, from the ghastly field with its blood-



## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

soaked herbage and its piled-up heaps of dead, they came unscathed. At Spottsylvania Court-House and up and down and across the North Anna, through all of May they marched and fought. At Cold Harbor, in the early days of June, they faced, with their comrades, the merciless fire of those Confederate riflemen, until, scorched, winnowed, withered, the Union army, with ten thousand dead and wounded on the field, retired from the hopeless and unequal contest. Yet father and son came out of it without serious injury. Shocked, sickened, exhausted, they were indeed; scratched here and there by hissing bullets, but otherwise unharmed. Again, in the awful fiasco before Petersburg, in the crater left by the exploding mine, hemmed in, helpless, horribly entangled, black soldiers and white falling by hundreds under the pitiless enfilading fire of a thousand down-pointed Confederate guns, even from that pit of death they escaped, wrenched, bruised, battered, buffeted, but whole.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

So, through all that summer they fought, in the bloodiest, cruelest campaign recorded in history, shallow trenches filled with dead everywhere proclaiming the awful sacrifice at which Grant was forcing the desperate and depleted armies of the South into their final strongholds.

As his officers had predicted from the beginning, Bob Bannister was rapidly promoted. For meritorious conduct, for brave deeds, to fill vacancies above him as the grim tragedy of war played itself out, he donned his corporal's stripes, exchanged them for a sergeant's, added the orderly's diamond, and finally, in the fall of '64, his shoulders were decorated with the straps of a first lieutenant. When this happened his company held a jubilee. He was a mere boy, indeed, not long past eighteen, possibly the youngest commissioned officer in the Army of the Potomac; but the men of his command trusted him, believed in him, loved him, and would have followed him wherever he chose to lead, even to the gates of death.

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

But Rhett Bannister was not promoted. That was not, however, the fault of his officers. Nor was it that his conduct was not splendidly soldier-like and meritorious, — it was simply because he would not have it so. It was after Cold Harbor that Captain Baker called him one night to company headquarters, — Howarth had long ago been invalided home, — and said to him: —

“Bannister, I am going to make a sergeant of you.”

“But, captain —”

“Oh, I know how you feel, but there’s no help for it. Brady’s dead, Holbert’s a prisoner, and Powelton and Gray can’t do the work. You must take it.”

“Captain, I beg of you not to do it. Be good to me. I’ll fight anywhere. I’ll take any mission. I’ll face any danger. But I can’t accept an office in the army of the United States. I told you this when you spoke of making me a corporal. I repeat it now. If I were to accept this honor I

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

never could fight again, I never could look the boys in the face again, I would feel so cowardly and ashamed and dismayed. Don't do it, captain, I beseech you, don't do it! Let me fight in the ranks and be contented and happy as I am to-night."

And the captain gave heed to his protest, knowing that it came from his heart; and so he continued to fight in the ranks, honored, trusted, and loved by all his comrades. In the midst of the political campaign of '64, when the contest for the office of President of the United States was stirring the North as no political contest had ever stirred it before; when Lincoln's enemies felt that they had won the victory, and that the battle of the ballots on election day would only ratify it; when Lincoln himself gave up the hope that he would be permitted to lead the nation back to peace and safety; when only the votes of the soldiers in the field could by any possibility save the day, Rhett Bannister turned politician and went out electioneering. From man to

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

man he went, from company to company, from regiment to regiment, earnest, anxious, persuasive, pleading with his whole heart and soul the cause of Abraham Lincoln. And when the November ballots were counted, and the overwhelming majority proved that the people in the North as well as the soldiers in the field had confidence in the great War President, no heart in the Army of the Potomac beat with more exultant pride and unbounded happiness than did the heart of Rhett Bannister, the Lincoln conscript.

In March came the President's second inaugural address. A newspaper containing a report of it floated early into camp and came into Bannister's hands. He read the address word by word, sentence by sentence again and again. Then he called together the men who were fond of listening to him and read it to them.

"You will not find," he said, "in all history, nor in all literature, a clause so sublime in thought, so simple in diction, so

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

sweet with divine charity as this; listen: 'With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to **finish** the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.'

"Gentlemen, that is Abraham Lincoln, than whom no man who ever lived in America has had a higher aim, a sweeter spirit, or a more prophetic vision."

All winter Grant had sat before Petersburg, grim, silent, relentless, pushing here and there ever a little farther to the front, seeking the exhaustion of his enemy, waiting for the auspicious moment to let fall the blow which should lead quickly to the inevitable end. To Lee's army looking from the heights on the tented foe in front of them by day, on the thousand camp-fires gleaming there at night, it seemed as though



## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

a ravenous monster, white-toothed, fiery-eyed, lay crouching before them, stretching out a sharp claw now and then, waiting pitilessly until the exhausted foe, weak and helpless, should fall, an easy prey, into its clutches. Surely no soldier, no army, ever held out more bravely against more fearful odds, in more desperate straits, than did this remnant of Lee's tattered host, in its final effort to save the Confederate capital from falling into the hands of its enemies. Yet every drum-beat trembling on the soft spring air was but the knell of Richmond's hope; every passing hour brought nearer and nearer her unavoidable doom.

Late in March Grant threw out a force on his left, under Sheridan, to meet and turn, and crush if possible, Lee's right flank, and thus precipitate the fall of Petersburg. It was at Five Forks that the two armies met and clashed in the last decisive battle of the war. Overwhelmed in front, cut off from the main column on the left, borne down upon from the rear, fighting twice



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

its numbers on every side, the little army of Confederate veterans, with a thousand of its men already captured, and a thousand lying dead and wounded along the barricades it had so stoutly defended, broke and fled helplessly and hopelessly to the west, only the darkness of night saving it from utter annihilation at the hands of Sheridan's pursuing cavalry.

But on that field of Five Forks, after the blue-clad hosts had swept over it across the enemy's redoubts, and only the grim harvest of battle was left, dread rows of fallen men and horses struggling and groaning among the silent dead, Rhett Bannister lay, at the edge of the White Oak road, his shoulder pierced by a minié ball, his dim eyes seeking vainly for the child of his heart. And just beyond lay Bob, stretched on the greensward, his blood-splashed face turned upward to the twilight sky, seeing nothing, knowing nothing of battle or victory, of friend or foe, deaf alike to the dying thunders of the conflict,

## FIGHTING FOR THE FLAG

to the exultant shouts of the victors, to the heart-stirring cry of that father who would joyously have given his own life that his son might live

## CHAPTER XI

### THE GREAT TRAGEDY

**B**UT Bob Bannister was not killed at Five Forks, nor did he die of his wounds. A fragment of a bursting shell had struck his head, torn loose the scalp, laid bare the skull, felled him with a crash, and left him insensible for hours. He did not know when he was carried from the field; but, later on, he realized that he was being jolted over rough roads, that somewhere there was a great pain of which he was dimly conscious, and that now and then a cup of water was placed most refreshingly to his parched lips. When he did come fully to himself it was the day after the battle, and he was in the army hospital at City Point, one of the hundreds of occupants of the long rows of cots that lined the walls. His head was swathed in bandages, a blinding pain shot back and forth across

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

his eyes, and in his mouth was still that insatiable thirst. On the cot beside him lay his father, who had also been ordered by the field surgeon to the hospital at City Point. Those minié balls made ugly wounds, as thousands of veterans of both armies can testify, and Rhett Bannister certainly needed surgical skill and careful nursing. But the surgeon who sent him to City Point, and who knew and loved both him and his son, had a deeper thought in mind. That wound of Bob's, under certain conditions, might suddenly lead to something very grave, and — well, it was a good idea for the boy to have his father at his side. But, for stalwart manhood and clean and vigorous youth, wounds yield readily to proper treatment, and, before many days had passed, both father and son were well on the road to recovery.

Then, one morning, a strange thing happened, and, to Bob Bannister, as he thought of it in after years, the most beautiful thing that ever entered into his life. Into the far,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

south door of the hospital tent, accompanied only by a member of his staff and an assistant surgeon, came Abraham Lincoln.

A whisper ran down the rows of cots that the President was there, and every man who could do so, rose to his feet, or sat up in bed, and saluted as "Father Abraham" passed by. At many a cot he stopped to give greeting to maimed and helpless veterans of the war, to speak words of encouragement to the sick and wounded boys who had fought and suffered that the common cause might triumph, to bend over the prostrate form of some poor wreck tossed up from the awful whirlpool of battle. Soldiers who lived never forgot the benediction of his presence that beautiful day, and more than one fell into his last sleep with the vision of the fatherly and sympathetic face of the beloved President before his dim and closing eyes.

They came to the ward where lay the sick and wounded Southern prisoners.

"You won't want to go in there, Mr.

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

President," said the young surgeon who was escorting him, "those are only rebels in there."

The President turned and laid his large hand gently on the shoulder of his escort, and looked serenely and earnestly into his eyes.

"You mean," he said, "that they are Confederates. I want to see them."

And so, into the Confederate wards he went, greeting every sufferer as he passed, asking after their wants, bringing to all of them good cheer and hopefulness and helpfulness as he passed by. One boy of seventeen said to him: —

"My father knew you, Mr. Lincoln, before the war. He was killed at Chantilly. He said to me once: 'Whatever happens, don't you ever believe Abraham Lincoln guilty of harshness or cruelty.' I am so glad to have told you that, Mr. Lincoln, before I die."

And Lincoln, as he pushed back the damp hair from the boy's forehead, and inquired

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

the father's name, and saw the death pallor already stealing into the young face, said :—

“Thank you, my son. If I know my own heart, there has never been harshness or cruelty in it; there is no malice or bitterness in it to-day. I sympathize with you. I sympathize with all of you —” he lifted his head and looked around on the rapt faces turned toward him — “the more because your cause is a lost cause, because you are suffering also the bitterness of defeat. And yet I feel that, under God, this very defeat will prove the salvation of your beloved South.”

And so he passed on. When he came to the cot where Rhett Bannister was lying, he gave him a word of simple greeting and would have gone by had not something in the man's face attracted his attention and caused him to stop.

“Have I ever seen you before?” he inquired.

“Yes, Mr. President. I am Rhett Bannister from Pennsylvania. I spent a half-



## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

hour with you one morning in the Secretary's room in the War Department, in the fall of '63. I was an escaped conscript that morning."

A smile of recognition lit up the face of the President, and his gnarled hand grasped the hand of the wounded man.

"I remember," he said. "I remember very well. And have you been in the service ever since?"

Some one across the aisle, who had heard the conversation, replied that time for Bannister.

"Yes, Mr. President, he has. And he's been the bravest and the best soldier in the ranks, bar none. I'm the adjutant of his battalion, and I know."

"Good!" exclaimed the President. "Oh, that's very good. I felt that we'd make a good soldier of him in the end. And, let's see! There was a boy whose place you took. The boy went home."

"No, Mr. President, he would n't go, so we both stayed."

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“The boy would n’t go home? What became of him?”

“He’s here, Mr. President, on the next cot. We were both clipped at Five Forks.”

The President turned half round and looked incredulously on the pale face of the youth at his side. Then he took the boy’s two hands in both of his, and bent over him. There was no grace in the movement, there was no beauty of face or smoothness of diction to add charm to the incident; but Bob Bannister will remember to his last hour on earth how the great War President leaned over him and spoke.

“My boy, of such stuff are patriots and heroes made.”

Then, glancing at the wall where Bob’s frayed and dusty coat hung at the head of his cot, with the shoulder-straps of a first lieutenant half showing, he said, inquiringly: —

“That coat’s not yours?”

“It is mine, Mr. President.”

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

Lincoln looked down again at the boyish face beneath him.

“It’s hard to believe,” he said.

And then the adjutant across the aisle spoke up for the second time.

“It’s quite true, Mr. President. And he has splendidly earned every step of his promotion.”

Still holding the boy’s hands and looking down into his face, the President said: —

“I thank you, my son. In the name of the country for which you have fought and suffered, I thank you.”

After a moment he added: —

“And, let me see, there was a mother back there in Pennsylvania, was n’t there? How’s the mother?”

“Very well, Mr. Lincoln, and waiting patiently for us.”

“Well, you’re going home to her very soon now. The mothers are going to have their reward. The war is almost over now, my boy — it’s almost over, Bannister. Peace is coming, next week maybe, next month for

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

sure. And the peace that's coming was well worth fighting for. I tell you the mothers have not agonized in vain, the dead have not died for naught."

There were tears in his eyes as he spoke. He never could quite get over his pity for the mothers whose boys had died in the conflict, nor his sorrow over the unnumbered lives lost in the maelstrom of war. These things lay, always, a mighty burden on his heart. He lived with them by day and he dreamed of them at night. But now that there were to be no more battles, no more agonies, no more dead faces turned upward to the sky, a thankfulness such as no other life has ever known filled his soul and suffused his countenance. Rhett Bannister, who had seen him in the dark days of '63, and who had ever since been haunted by the inexpressible sadness of his face, noted at once how that face had been transfigured. Not that it bore evidence now of pride or exultation, or a selfish joy in victories achieved, but rather that it shone with a

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

great gladness because the sufferings and the hardships and the heart-agonies of a whole nation were so near their end. After a little he loosed one of Bob's hands and took one of Bannister's.

"Good-by, boys!" he said, "and health to you, and a happy home-going. Some day you'll come to Washington. Come in and see me. I'll be waiting for you. Good-by!"

He passed down the aisle, tall, loose-jointed, with ill-fitting clothes and awkward mien; but to those two wounded soldiers on their cots it seemed that a more beautiful presence than his had never passed their way.

Wounds heal rapidly when light hearts and clean living add their measure of assistance to the surgeon's skill. And so it came about that both Bannister and his son were discharged from the hospital a week later. With the surgeon's certificates in their pockets, they were ready to start toward the North, toward home, toward the sweetest,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

most life-giving spot in all the world. They would not need to come back, they knew that, for the war was practically over. Richmond had fallen, Lee had surrendered, Johnston's army would soon be in the hands of Sherman, there was no more fighting to be done. So they went on board a transport one day, and rode down the James and up the Potomac to Washington. It was early in the evening when they reached the city, and after a good meal and a refreshing rest they went out on the streets for a short stroll before retiring. They were to leave Washington on an early train the next morning, and they thought to get a glimpse of it this night in its holiday attire, as it might be many years before either of them would come that way again.

It was a beautiful spring night. The air was soft, and heavy with the scent of blossoming lilacs. The night before, the city had been splendidly illuminated in honor of the recent victories and the dawn of peace, and to-night the rejoicings were

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

still going on. The crowds that filled the streets were happy, high-spirited, exultant. Oh, but it was a different city from the one through which Bob Bannister went, on his way to war, in the fall of '63! Then gloom, anxiety, was on the face of every person who went hurrying by; despondency in the slow gait of every loiterer on the streets. And over the head of the Chief Magistrate hung ever the horror of blood, on his heart weighed ever the apprehension of unforeseen disaster. But to-night, how different! Some one who had seen the President that day said he had not been so happy, so contented, so tender and serene, since he had been in Washington. His son Captain Robert Lincoln had come up from the South and spent the morning with him. Some friends from the West had occupied his joyful attention for a brief time in the afternoon. All who saw him that day never afterward forgot the peaceful and gentle serenity of his face. He had said to the members of his Cabinet at their meeting



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

that morning, that, on his part, there was no feeling of hate or vindictiveness toward any person of the South. That, so far as he could control it, now that the war was over, there should be no persecution, no more bloody work of any kind. That resentment must give way and be extinguished, and harmony and union must prevail.

As Bannister and his son walked through the gay crowds on the streets that night, they heard people say that the President and Mrs. Lincoln had gone with a small party to see the play, "Our American Cousin," at Ford's Theatre on Tenth Street. It was a time for relaxation and pleasure, and the President wanted the people to feel that he rejoiced with them. When the play should be over, there would be a crowd waiting at the door of the play-house to see the Chief Magistrate come out and enter his carriage, and to show their admiration and love for him by cheers and huzzas and the waving of hats and handkerchiefs. The theatre was not far away, and

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

Bannister and Bob thought to go there and take part in the demonstration. F Street, along which they were walking, was almost deserted. The crowds had gravitated down into E Street and beyond, and were thronging Pennsylvania Avenue.

Bob looked at his watch, — the boys of his company had sent it to him as a memento before he left the hospital, — and saw that it was nearly half-past ten.

“I think we ’ll have to hurry a little, father,” he said. “the play must be nearly over now.”

So they quickened their steps. Between Tenth and Eleventh Streets, as they hurried along, a strange thing happened. As they passed the mouth of an alley leading to the centre of the block, toward E Street, their attention was attracted by an unusual noise proceeding from the depths of the passageway. Some one down there was shouting and cursing. Then there was a clatter of horse’s hoofs on the cobblestone pavement; around the corner of a building,

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

and into the light of the dim lamp hung at the foot of the alley, clanging up the passage and dashing out into the street, came a man on horseback. He was hatless, wild-eyed, terrible in countenance and mien. In one hand he held his horse's rein, in the other he grasped a dagger, shining in the moonlight at the hilt, stained with blood on the blade. Heading his horse to the north, bending forward in his saddle, his long, dark hair flying out behind him, he went, in a mad gallop, up the half-deserted street, and, before the astonished onlookers had fairly caught breath, he had vanished into the night. A half-dozen men, strolling along in that vicinity, turned and gazed after the flying horseman, and then all, with one accord, involuntarily started in the direction he had taken. At the corner of Tenth Street, as they looked down toward Ford's Theatre, they saw that there was some confusion there. Men were running toward the play-house, other men were pushing their passage from its doorway. There were

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

shouts which Bannister and his son could not understand, but they, with the others, ran down toward the centre of the disturbance. Before they were able to reach the front of the theatre, the cry came, loud and clear, so that all could hear it: —

“Lincoln has been shot!”

And again: —

“The President has been killed!”

One man, white-faced, bareheaded, rushed from the doorway of the theatre crying: —

“Stop the assassin! Stop him! It was Wilkes Booth. Don’t let him get away!”

But those who had seen the flying horseman disappear down the long moonlit vista of F Street, knew that the assassin had already made his escape.

Men and women, with horror-stricken faces, were now pouring from the entrance to the play-house. The street was filling up with a jostling, questioning, gesticulating crowd. “How did it happen?” — “Who did it?” — “Why was it done?” — “Where

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

is the murderer?" — "Catch him!" — "Hang him!" Men demanded information, and action as well. Two soldiers in full uniform, with side-arms, hurled themselves out into the roadway, through the crowd, and up toward F Street. Some one called a boy and told him to run to the White House as though his life were the forfeit for delay, and tell Robert Lincoln to come.

And then, suddenly, a hush fell upon the crowd. It was known that they were bringing the President down. The space about the doorway was cleared, and out into the lamplight came men bearing the long, limp body of Abraham Lincoln. At the sidewalk they hesitated and stopped. What should they do with him? There was no carriage there. And if there had been, it was too long and rough a journey to the White House to take a dying man. Diagonally across the street, on the high front porch of a plain three-story dwelling-house, a young man stood. He had come from

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

his bed-chamber to learn the cause of the disturbance, and seeing the limp body of the President brought from the door of the theatre, and that the bearers were in doubt as to what they should do, he called out across the street, over the heads of the multitude: —

“Bring him in here! Bring him in here!”

And the men who were carrying the body, having no plan of their own, knowing nothing better to do, bore their unconscious burden across the way, up the steep and winding stairs to the porch, through the modest doorway and down the narrow hall into a small plain sleeping-room at the end, and laid the President of the United States on a bed where a soldier of the ranks, home on furlough, had slept for many nights.

And it was there that the President died. Not in the White House with its stately halls and ornate rooms, not where his labor had been done and his cares had weighed him down, not where his hours of anguish

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

had been spent and his tears of pity had been shed ; but here, in this humble home, like the homes he had loved and lived in before the nation called him for its chief, it was here, in the gray of the next morning, that he died. And Stanton, his great War Secretary, standing at his bedside when the last breath left the mortal body, Stanton who had known him for many years, who had in turn denounced him, ridiculed him, criticised him, honored him, and loved him, turned in that moment to the awe-stricken onlookers at the last scene and said: "Now he is with the ages."

Among those lining the pathway across the street along which the President's body was borne, dripping blood as it passed, stood Rhett Bannister and his son. For one moment, as the moonlight fell on the gray face, already stamped with the seal of death, they saw him. His long arms hung loosely at his sides, his eyes were closed, his countenance showed no mark



## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

of suffering, save that some one, holding his wounded head, had inadvertently smeared his cheek with blood. They never forgot that sight. They never could forget it. Many and many a time, in the stillness of midnight, in the light and noise of noon-day, no matter where or when, the vision of that face they both had known and loved, with its closed eyes and tangled hair, and with the blood-splash on the cheek, came back to them, with its never-ending shock and sorrow.

After the President's body had passed, and the crowd closed in again, and men took second thought and began to realize the horror of the hour, and to rave against the assassin, and those who might have influenced him, and while women, pale-faced and unbonneted, wept and wrung their hands, the soldiers came and cleared the theatre, and drove the people from the street; and thenceforward, until the dead body of the Chief Magistrate had been borne from the humble house where he

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

died, no one without authority was permitted to pass that way.

Rhett Bannister and Bob were pushed and crowded back with the rest up into F Street, along which they had been quietly strolling a half-hour earlier, and there, exhausted from the shock of the tragedy, grief-stricken as they had never been before, they sat down on the street curb to rest. And, even as they sat there, men came running by calling out that Secretary of State Seward had been stabbed in his bed, and that every member of the Cabinet had been marked for murder.

"Father," said Bob, when he found his voice to speak, "what does it all mean?"

"I don't know, Robert, except that the most inhuman and uncalled-for crime that ever marred the centuries has been committed this night."

"Father, I can't go home. While such things as these are still possible I would n't dare go home, there's more work for us to do yet in the army. I am going back to-

## THE GREAT TRAGEDY

morrow morning to join my regiment in Virginia."

"You are right, my son, and I will go back with you."

And they went.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE WELCOME HOME

**T**HE war was over. Peace rested on the land. All men, North and South, were thankful that the shedding of human blood had ceased. June came, brighter, more beautiful, than any other June of which living men had memory. The world was filled with sunshine, with flowers, with the songs of birds, with the flashings of waters, with the gladness of nature and humanity. The last tired, tattered soldier of the South had gone back to his home to pick up the broken threads of destiny and to begin his life anew. And, slowly drifting up from camp and battle-field, the veterans of the Union army were coming by ones and twos and in little groups, some of them mere ghosts of the boys who had gone to the front when the war was on. But for every war-worn soldier thus returning there was one

## THE WELCOME HOME

who would never come again. So there were tears as well as smiles, and heart-aches as well as rejoicings.

But the soldiers from Mount Hermon did not come until after the close of the Grand Review in Washington, in which they took part. Then they too turned their faces toward home. It was agreed that they should all come together. And Mount Hermon, that had sent them forth with its God-speed, that had rejoiced in their victories and sorrowed in their defeats, was ready to welcome them back. They were to come on a special car that would reach Carbon Creek late in the forenoon. There they were to be met by a committee of welcome, with a band of music and decorated wagons. The party would reach Mount Hermon about noon, and after the first greetings had been given, there was to be a dinner under a great tent on the public square, the finest dinner that the men of Mount Hermon could buy and the women of Mount Hermon could prepare. And

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

after the dinner, from the platform at the end of the tent, there were to be addresses of welcome, and music, and every returning man and boy who had worn the blue was to be made to feel that the town was proud of him this day, and honored him for the service he had performed for his country and the lustre he had shed upon Mount Hermon.

So, on the day of the arrival, the committee of welcome was at Carbon Creek a full hour before the train was due, so fearful were they lest by some unforeseen delay they should be one minute too late. In due time the procession, half a hundred strong, started on its way to Mount Hermon, the band in the first wagon playing "Marching through Georgia." All along the route there was, as the newspapers said next day, "a continuous ovation." Farm-houses were decorated, flags were flying everywhere, groups of cheering citizens stood at every crossroad. When they reached the borough line, they all descended from the wagons

## THE WELCOME HOME

and formed on foot to march to the village green. Not quite as they had formed in other days under Southern skies, for now there was no one in command ; officers and privates alike were in the ranks to-day, marching shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, in one long, glad, home-coming procession. But you could n't keep those ranks in order ; no one could have kept them in order. One old veteran said that Ulysses Grant himself could n't have kept the men in line, there was so much cheering, so much hand-shaking, so many waiting wives and mothers and children to be kissed and hugged and kissed again. And long before the great tent on the green was reached there was no more semblance of order in those happy ranks, than you would have found among a group of schoolgirls out for a holiday.

Private Bannister and his son were both in the procession. Not that it was Rhett Bannister's choice to be there. He had thought to make the journey back to his home quietly and alone, in much the same



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

way that he had left it nearly two years before, and there await such welcome, good or ill, as the people of the community might see fit to give him. But his comrades simply would not have it so. Indeed, they refused absolutely to go together, or to partake in the ceremony of welcome, unless he would go with them. So he went, not without many misgivings, fearing the worst, yet hoping for the best. And the best came. His record in the ranks had preceded him long before. The story of his conversion by Abraham Lincoln was a story that his neighbors never wearied of telling. And if there was one thing more than another on which Mount Hermon prided herself, next to having as one of her own boys the youngest commissioned officer in the Army of the Potomac, it was on the fact that Rhett Bannister, the once hated, despised, and outlawed copperhead, had become one of the best and bravest and truest soldiers in the armies of his country.

And so Mount Hermon welcomed him.

## THE WELCOME HOME

Nor could he for one moment doubt the sincerity of his welcome. The hearty hand-clasp, the trembling voice, the tear-dimmed eye with which old friends and neighbors greeted him, left no room for questionings.

One block from the public square Henry Bradbury came upon them. He put his one remaining arm around Bob's shoulders and hugged him till he winced.

"You rascal!" he exclaimed. "You runaway! You patriot! God bless you!"

Then he released Bob, and grasped Bob's father's hand.

"Rhett Bannister," he said, "I never took hold of but one man's hand in my life before, that I was prouder to shake, and that was Abraham Lincoln's."

Then when he got his voice again, he added:—

"Fall out, both of you. Sarah Jane Stark wants to see you at her house before you go to the square."

So they followed him three blocks

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

around, and down to the house of Sarah Jane Stark. She was there in the hall, waiting for them.

“Bob Bannister,” she said, “I love you!” And she put her hands up on his broad shoulders and kissed him on both cheeks. Then she turned to Bob’s father, and, without a word, and much to his amazement and confusion, she saluted him in the same way.

“There!” she exclaimed, “that’s the first time I’ve kissed a man in forty years. I never expect to kiss another, but — to-day — it’s worth it. There, not a word! I know what I’m doing. Go in there, both of you. March!”

She opened the parlor door, thrust them both into the room, and closed the door on them without another word. In that room were Mary Bannister and Louise. At the end of fifteen minutes, Sarah Jane Stark came back down the hall and knocked briskly.

“Come,” she said, “it’s time to go to the

## THE WELCOME HOME

square. You need n't think you can stay here and make love all day. And I won't give you a thing to eat. You've got to go up to the tent and eat with the rest of us."

On the way up she walked with Bob. She had a thousand questions to ask, nor could Bob get one quite answered before a new one would strike him squarely between the eyes. But when she said: "And where's that dear sergeant who took breakfast with us one morning, and who could n't say grace; what became of him?" and Bob answered, "He was killed at Cold Harbor, Miss Stark," she was silent for a full minute.

They were just ready to sit down to dinner in the big tent when the Bannisters arrived. A place had been reserved for them at the head of the table, two and two on each side of the master of the feast, with all the other veterans and their wives and daughters and sweethearts in line below, and the patriotic citizens of Mount Hermon filling up the rest of the long tables.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

That was a dinner! In the whole history of Mount Hermon nothing had been known to equal it. And when it was over, and the tables had been partly cleared, the flag at the end of the tent was drawn aside, and there on the platform were the speakers, the singers, and the band. A chorus of girls, dressed in white, with little flags in their hands, sang "America." There was a brief and fervent prayer by the old clergyman who had married nearly every one's father and mother in Mount Hermon, and who knew all the middle-aged people by their first names. Then the burgess of the borough delivered the address of welcome, and the band played. After that the chairman of the meeting rose and rapped for order.

"Our young friends," he said, "desire to participate, to a brief extent, in this programme of rejoicing. I will call upon Master Samuel Powers."

So Master Samuel Powers made his way awkwardly and blushing up between

## THE WELCOME HOME

benches and tables, to the platform. At the steps he stumbled, recovered himself with a masterly jerk, and continued on his course. Turning to the audience, red-faced and frightened, he began to search in his pockets for something that he had evidently mislaid. Into his coat pockets and trousers pockets, each side in turn, outside and inside, he searched with increasing desperation, but in vain. Then he tried the pockets all over again, with the same result. The audience began to see the comical side of the boy's embarrassment, and half-suppressed laughter was heard throughout the tent. Some one in the crowd yelled:—

“Cough it up, Sam! cough it up! You've swallowed it!”

And a boy's voice somewhere in the rear responded:—

“Aw, snakes! Let 'im alone. He's got it in his head. Give it to 'em, Sammy, boy! Chuck it at 'em! Go it!”

Thus adjured, Sam advanced to the front of the platform.



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

"I had a paper," he said, "to read from, but I guess I've lost it. Anyway, what I want to say is that two years ago us boys had a military company here. An' we've got it yet. An' we're goin' to keep it. Well, two years ago Bob Bannister tried to get in the company an' we would n't let 'im in because —" he gave a frightened glance at Rhett Bannister, sitting below him — "I might as well tell — because his father was a copperhead. Well, after what happened we got a little ashamed of ourselves, an' when we heard how he was fightin' down there in a real company, we were all sorry we had n't let him in. So when our captain moved away we elected Bob Bannister captain, with leave of absence till the war was over. But somehow or another that did n't seem to be quite enough to do. An' then when we heard about Five Forks we got together an' chipped in, and our fathers helped us a little, and we bought him the best sword an' silk sash that Henry Bradbury could find in New York, an' we want



## THE WELCOME HOME

to give it to him here to-day. Say, Bill Hinkle, bring that sword up here!”

Thunders of applause greeted Sam’s remarks. Some one took Bob by the arm and dragged him to the platform, and when he had received the sword, which was indeed a beauty, there were insistent calls for a speech. Bob looked down to his father for help and inspiration, and as he did so the audience saw on his head the long, red, ragged scar over which the hair had not yet grown, and then the applause was renewed with threefold vehemence.

Finally he managed to stammer out:—

“I can’t make a speech. I’m sure this tribute from the boys has touched my heart. I know I’m very grateful to you all for the way you’ve welcomed me. I’ll never forget this day, and — and I guess that’s all.”

He turned and made a rapid retreat from the platform, while the audience shouted itself hoarse with approval of his speech. There was more music by the band, and

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

then Judge Morgan mounted the platform. He had aged much during the last two years of the war, and his hand trembled visibly as he thrust it, after the old fashion, into the breast of his tightly buttoned Prince Albert coat. But his voice, though quavering a little at the start, was still strong and penetrating, and no one in the audience could fail to hear him as he spoke.

“Mr. Chairman, returning soldiers of the Union armies, ladies and fellow citizens: —

“Some two years ago it was my fortune, or misfortune as you choose, to be present at a meeting of the citizens of Mount Hermon, held on the nation’s natal day, on this very spot. The great battle of Gettysburg had just been fought. Public feeling ran high, the spirit of patriotism was at white heat. It became my duty to draw and present to that meeting a set of resolutions condemnatory of one of our fellow citizens whose unpatriotic attitude and open disloyalty brought down upon his head our righteous wrath. I need not repeat those

## THE WELCOME HOME

resolutions here. I need not call your attention further to the exciting incidents of that day. Many of you will remember them. I will hasten on to say that it has been my duty and my great pleasure to prepare another set of resolutions to be presented to this meeting to-day. They are as follows:—

“RESOLVED: *First*, — That the resolutions heretofore adopted by the citizens of Mount Hermon on the fourth day of July, A. D. 1863, denouncing as disloyal and unworthy of citizenship one Rhett Bannister, be and they are hereby absolutely suspended, revoked, and made void.

“*Second*, — That we welcome the said Rhett Bannister to his home as he returns to us from the war, bringing with him a record for loyalty and courage of which the best and bravest soldier might well be proud. And we congratulate him and his noble wife on the splendid service which their son Lieutenant Robert Barnwell Bannister has rendered to his country in her hour of need.

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

“*Third*, — That we welcome with open arms and thankful hearts all these soldiers of the Republic, who have returned to us this day bearing laurels of victory, and we extend our assistance and condolence to all sick and wounded veterans and to all widows and orphans through whose sufferings our country has been saved.

“Mr. Chairman, I move the adoption of these resolutions by a rising vote.”

And how they did vote! rising of course, standing on chairs, tables, anything; cheering, waving hats and handkerchiefs, to express their approval of the resolutions which Judge Morgan had so acceptably framed. Then there were shouts for “Bannister! Rhett Bannister! Rhett Bannister!”

At first he did not want to go. Then, as the second and wiser thought came to him, he mounted the platform and faced his fellow townsmen. In the beginning he could not quite control his voice, but it soon got back its old resonant ring, and then the

## THE WELCOME HOME

audience sat in rapt attention, listening to his words.

“My friends and neighbors, I do not deserve this. I never dreamed of a welcome home like this. I thought to come back quietly, alone, and slip as easily as I might into the old grooves, and I hoped that some day, possibly, you would forget. But the boys who marched with me, fought with me, suffered with me, not one of whom but has been braver, truer, more faithful, and more deserving than I, — the boys, I say, would not listen to it. So here I am, with them — and you. And now that I am here I want to say to you what I have had it in my heart to say to you, night and day, for nearly two years. I am, as you know, descended from the men and women of the South. When the war came on I sympathized with my brothers there. If I had been resident among them then, and had failed to rally to their cause, I would have been more than a poltroon. I could not see that the environment of a lifetime here

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

should have led me into wiser counsels and better judgment. You know the story of my folly. But, like Saul of Tarsus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, I came one day into the presence of an overmastering soul. I went out from that presence changed, and utterly subdued. I saw things in a new light and with a larger vision. Not that I loved my people of the South any less, but that I loved my country more. By the grace and mercy of Abraham Lincoln, and the goodness of God, I was permitted to fight in the ranks of my country's soldiers, side by side with my son whom you have just seen and heard. I never commended this boy publicly before, and it is not probable that I ever shall again ; but I will say to-day, that no knight of old ever sought the Holy Grail with more persistent courage and deeper devotion than he has sought his country's welfare. As for me, I am what I am to-day, I have done what I have done, because of Abraham Lincoln. If you had seen him as I saw him, if you had heard him as I heard



## THE WELCOME HOME

him, you would have loved him as I loved him — yet not so deeply. For my love was greater because he loved my people of the South. Doubt me if you will, discredit me if you must, but I speak what I believe and know when I say that the men and women of the South have never had a better friend, a truer guide, a wiser counselor, than they lost when the foul assassin's bullet sent this gentle spirit to its home. I have done what I could. I have been the best soldier I knew how to be. Now I am back with you, to take up once more the old life, and to try to prove to you through all the days and nights that are to come, that your flag is my flag, that your country is my country, and that this home among the Pennsylvania hills was never quite so dear to me before as it is to-day. I thank you. I am grateful to you all. Your welcome has touched me so deeply — so deeply" — and then his voice went utterly to pieces, and with tears of joy streaming down his face, he left the stand.



## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

The meeting did not last long after that. There were more numbers on the programme indeed. But when Rhett Bannister had finished, so many were talking, so many were cheering, so many were crying, that the chairman simply let the people have their own way and finish as they would.

It was a happy supper-party at the Bannister home that night; so like the suppers in the summer days of old, in the years before the war. After it was over, Bob went down by the path across the meadow, as he used to go, to see Seth Mills. The old man had failed much of late. Age was resting heavily upon him, and he was too feeble to go far from home.

And in the beautiful June twilight Rhett Bannister sat upon his porch and looked out upon the old familiar scene: the fields, the trees, the road, the clear and wonderful expanse of sky. But when his eyes wandered, for a moment, to the shop and the windmill tower crowned by the motionless

## THE WELCOME HOME

blades of the big wheel, he turned them away. There were things which, on this night of nights, he did not care to bring back to memory. And, as he sat there, holding in his own the hand of the happiest, proudest woman that the stars looked down upon that summer night in all the old Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, there came the well-remembered click of the front-gate latch, and, out of the darkness, hobbling slowly up the walk, came the bent figure of Seth Mills. Bannister leaped from the porch and hurried down the path to meet him. The old man stopped and looked him over in well-feigned dismay.

"Rhett Bannister," he exclaimed, "you blamed ol' copperhead! you skallywag deserter! you deep-dyed villyan! what 'a you wearin' them blue soldier clothes fur?"

Then, as Bannister hesitated, in doubt as to how he should take this outburst, his visitor broke into a hearty laugh.

"Well, Rhett," he said, "I forgive you. I forgive you. Where's your hand? Where's

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

your two hands? I knowed what you'd do when the boy went. I told him so. God bless you, but I'm proud of you! I'm proud o' both of you! Bob's been down; splendid boy; said I must n't come up here; too fur to walk. I told him to mind his own business; that I was comin' up to shake hands with Rhett Bannister ef it took a leg; ef it took both legs, by cracky!"

Bannister helped the old man up the steps, and made him comfortable in a big porch-chair, and told him a hundred things he wanted to know, and at last he told him about Abraham Lincoln.

"You know I saw the President?"

"I heard all about it, Rhett. You've been blessed above your fellow men."

"But you did n't know that he spoke to me of you?"

"Of me? Seth Mills?"

"Yes, of you. He told me that story about how you settled the spring controversy with Sam Lewis."

"No!"

## THE WELCOME HOME

“Yes, he did. And then I told him that I knew you, that you were my nearest and best neighbor; and he said: ‘You tell Seth Mills for me, if you ever see him again, that Abe Lincoln remembers him, and sends him greeting and good wishes in memory of the old days in Sangamon County.’ I’ve carried that message in my heart for you through blood and fire, Seth, and now, to-night, it is yours.”

But the old man did not reply. Instead, his hand stole out and rested on his neighbor’s knee, and then, softly in the darkness, Bannister heard him sob.

But Seth Mills went home at last, and over the crest of the eastern hill-range the full moon came shining. And then something else happened. From the shadows of the roadway that fronted the house, suddenly, sweetly, jubilantly on the night air, came the music of a chorus of fresh young voices singing: —

“Home, home, sweet, sweet home;  
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.”

## A LINCOLN CONSCRIPT

They were the same boys who, two years before, had marched down the road at night singing songs of derision to the hated copperhead.

Ah! but those two years. What may not happen in a time like that? What change of thought, of heart, of life? What tragedy and transformation?

As the faint, sweet chorus of the boy-singers came back to him across the moon-lit fields, Rhett Bannister turned his face to the star-strewn sky, and thanked God that after the storm and stress and trial, and through the ministry of one great man, he had fallen upon such glorious days.









